SUMMER

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BEING VOLUME TWO OF

The Soul Enchanted

By

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Translated from the French by

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NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1925

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PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Summer is the second volume of a work in several volumes that bears the title: *The Soul Enchanted.*

The first volume is entitled *Annette and Sylvie.*

To strive, to seek, *not* to find, and not to yield.

SUMMER

PART ONE

I

N the half-light of the room, with its closed shutters, Annette was sitting on her bed, smiling, with her white dressing-gown wrapped about her. Her unbound hair, which she had just washed, covered her shoulders. Through the open windows could be seen the motionless, golden warmth of an August mid-afternoon; without observing it, one felt out there the torpor of the Jardin de Boulogne sleeping in the sunlight. Annette shared in this beatitude. She could rest there for hours, stretched out, without stirring, without thinking, without needing to think. It was enough for her to know that there were two of her; and she did not even make an effort to talk with the "little one" who was inside her, because—of this she was sure—he felt what she felt, they understood one another without speaking. Waves of tenderness passed through the happy somnolence of her body. And then she relapsed again into a happy smile.

But if her mind was drowsy, her senses had retained a marvelous clairvoyance; they followed from moment to moment the fine vibrations of the air and the light. . . . A fragrant odor of strawberries in the garden. . . . She enjoyed it with her nostrils and her tongue. Her amused ear caught the slightest sound, the leaves brushed by a breeze, a footstep on the gravel, a voice in the street, a bell ringing for vespers. And the rumble ascending from the great crowds: Paris in 1900 . . . the summer of the

Exposition. In the vat of the Champ de Mars thousands of human grapes were fermenting in the sun. . . . Far enough away, yet close enough to the monstrous bubbling to feel its presence and to be safe from it, Annette rejoiced in the contrast of the peace and the shade of her nest. Vain tumult! The truth dwells within me. . . .

II

Her hearing, subtle and wandering like that of a cat, seized upon every sound that passed, one after another, and idly let it fall again; from the floor below she caught the ring of the door-bell and recognized the little steps of Sylvie, who was always in a hurry. Annette would have preferred to be left alone. But she was so solidly settled in her happiness that, no matter who came, nothing could disturb her.

It was only eight days since Sylvie had received her news. Since last spring she had heard nothing from her sister. A personal adventure that had not affected her very much had yet been enough to fill her thoughts: she had not realized how long the silence had been. But when the affair was settled and she found her mind free again, with time to think of it, she began to be troubled. She went to her aunt at the Boulogne house for news. She was very much surprised to hear that Annette had come back some time before. She was rather inclined to give the forgetful soul a good snubbing, but Annette tactfully turned her to another subject that surprised her; gently but feelingly, she had simply told her the whole story. Sylvie found it very difficult to listen to the end. That Annette, the sensible Annette, had done this mad

thing and refused to marry afterwards, no, it was unheard of, she simply wouldn't tolerate it! . . . This little Lucretia was scandalized. She railed at Annette; she called her an idiot. Annette remained calm. It was plain that nothing could make her change her mind. Sylvie realized that she had no hold on this obstinate soul: she would have liked to give her a good whipping! . . . But how was it possible to remain angry with such a lovable person who listened as you spoke with such a disarming smile! And then the mysterious charm of this maternity. . . . Sylvie anathematized it as a calamity, but she was too much a woman not to be touched. . . .

And today she had come again, with her mind made up to give Annette a good raking over the coals, to break down her stupid resistance, to oblige her to insist on marriage. . . . "If you don't, if you don't, I shall be furious! . . ." She came in like a gust of wind, smelling of rice-powder and battle. And to make a start, without saying good-morning, she began scolding about this mad way of passing one's days, shut up in the dark. But catching sight of the happy eyes of Annette, who stretched out her arms to her, she ran to her and hugged her. She went on scolding: "Fool! Silly! Arch-fool! . . . With her sweeping hair over her long white dressing-gown she looks like an angel. . . . But what a mistake it would be to think she was! . . . The sanctimonious wretch! The little scamp! . . ."

She shook her. Weariedly, contentedly, Annette let her have her way. Sylvie stopped in the middle of her tirade, took her sister's forehead between her hands and pushed back her hair. "She is fresh, she is pink, never have I seen her with such beautiful color. And that look of triumph! Good reason for it! Aren't you ashamed?"

"Not in the least!" said Annette. "I am happier than I have ever been before. And so strong, so well. For the first time in my life I feel complete, I desire nothing more. This longing that is going to be fulfilled for a child goes back so far in my life! Ever since I was a child myself. . . . Yes, when I was seven years old I was already dreaming of it."

"That's a fib," said Sylvie. "Only six months ago you told me you had never felt that maternity was your vocation."

"Do you really think that? Did I really say that?" said Annette, disconcerted. "It's true, I did say it. But I haven't lied, just the same, either now or then. . . . How explain it? I am not pretending. I remember clearly."

"I know how it is," said Sylvie. "When I have a fancy for something, I often immediately remember that I have never wanted anything but that since the day I was born."

Annette frowned; she was not satisfied. "The nature I feel today is my real nature. It always has been, but I didn't dare confess it to myself before the time came; I was afraid I was mistaken. Now . . . Oh! now, I see that it is even more beautiful than I had hoped. And it is my whole self. I want nothing more."

"When you wanted Roger or Tullio," said Sylvie maliciously, "you wanted nothing more."

"Oh, you don't understand anything! . . . Can the two things be compared? When I was in love (what you call 'love'), it wasn't I who wished it, I was forced. . . . How I suffered from that force that held me, without being able to resist it! . . . And now you see how my little one has come to my rescue when I was struggling in the bonds of the misery they call love, how he came, how he has saved me. My little liberator!"

Sylvie began to laugh. She had not in the least understood her sister's reasons. But she did not need any reasons to understand her maternal instinct: on that subject the two sisters would always be in accord. They began to chat affectionately about the little unknown creature (was it going to be a man or a woman?)—discussing a thousand nothings, serious and foolish, about its coming, things about which a woman never wearies of chattering.

They had been talking this way for a long time when Sylvie remembered that she had come to administer her lesson, not to sing a duet. "Annette," she said, "enough of this nonsense! There is a time for everything. Roger owes you marriage, and you must insist on it."

Annette made a weary gesture. "Why go back to that? I have told you that Roger offered it to me and that I refused."

"Well, when one has been stupid one should recognize it and change."

"I have no desire to change."

"Why don't you want to? You loved this man. I am sure you still love him. What has happened?"

Annette was unwilling to reply. Sylvie insisted, tactlessly seeking for the deep, personal reasons for their disagreement. Annette made an impatient gesture. Sylvie looked at her, astonished. Annette's expression was angry, her brows were knitted, her eyes full of irritation.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Annette, turning aside hastily.

Sylvie had touched a wound that she wanted to forget. Through an inconsistency she could not have explained, but which came from the depths of her nature, she who rejoiced at the coming of the child bore a grudge against

the man who had given it to her; she could not forgive herself because her senses had been taken by surprise, because of the passion that had betrayed her in this way—she could not forgive the man who had seized such an opportunity. This instinctive recoil had been the true, hidden reason (hidden from her as from the others) for her flight from Roger and her refusal to see him again. In the depths of her being she hated him because she had loved him. But as her mind was straightforward she repressed these instincts which she felt to be evil. Why was Sylvie forcing her to become aware of them? . . .

Sylvie looked at her and insisted no more. Annette, calm again, ashamed of what she had allowed to become visible, of what she had seen herself, tried to change the subject and said quietly, "I don't want to marry. I am not made for these exclusive bonds. You may tell me that millions of women get used to them, that I exaggerate their seriousness. But I am made in such a way that I take everything seriously. If I give myself, I give myself too much, and then I am smothered; I feel as if I were drowning with a stone around my neck. Perhaps I am not strong enough. My personality is not firmly established. Ties that are too close are bind-weeds that drain my energy; and there is not enough left for me. I try to please the 'other person,' to be like the image of what he wants me to be, and this ends badly. For in renouncing too much of one's nature one loses one's self-respect and cannot live any more; or one revolts and causes suffering. No, I am an egoist, Sylvie. I was made to live alone."

(Although she was not in any sense lying, she was uttering pretexts that masked the truth from herself.)

"You amuse me," said Sylvie. "You are the last woman to live without love."

"I hate it," said Annette. "But it will not catch me again now. I am protected from it."

"Beautifully protected!" said Sylvie. "He won't protect you in the least; you will have to protect him. You don't want to bind yourself, but have you thought of the fetters this little bundle is going to mean for you?"

"Happiness! With my arms filled, these arms that have been empty so long!"

"You are talking without thinking. Who is going to bring him up?"

"I."

"What about the father? He has rights over his child."

A new cloud of irritation passed over Annette's brows. . . . Rights! Rights over his child! . . . His child! The child of that man, that blind moment which he has already forgotten and which binds me for life! . . . Never! . . . My child is mine! . . . She said, "My child belongs to me."

"He will belong to whom he likes."

"Oh, I know whom he's going to like!"

"Seducer! And suppose that, in spite of everything, he reproaches you some day for depriving him of a father!"

"I shall fill his heart so full that there won't remain the tiniest place for regrets for anyone else."

"You are a monster of egoism."

"I said I was."

"You will be punished."

"Well, so much the worse for me if I can't make him love me! What's to prevent me from loving him and why shouldn't he love me?"

"If you really love him you should think first of his future. Plenty of other people have been obliged to

accept a disagreeable marriage for the sake of the child."

"You revolt me," said Annette, "praising those women who condemn themselves to a false marriage, sometimes one built on hatred, out of love for the child. You remind me of that mother who told her daughter she had endured hell for her sake by remaining married. The daughter replied: 'Do you think hell is a good home for a child?' "

"The child needs a father."

"But how about the thousands of people who have gone without one? How many have never known one at all! How many have lost their fathers in early childhood and have been brought up by their mothers alone! Are they inferior to other people? The child needs a protecting love. Why should not mine be enough?"

"You overestimate your strength. Do you know what is awaiting you?"

"I know, I know! The little arms of a child about my neck."

"But do you know the price the world will make you pay for it? It would be much better for you to be married and an adulteress four times over than to have people brand you with the name of an unmarried mother. To dare to assume the pains and responsibilities of motherhood without having first accepted the stamp of their official marriage is something for which a woman of their class is never pardoned. It would be all right for me. What people like myself do is of no consequence. Your bourgeois people even find that it pays to have things so. They are ready enough to praise free love in the working-class, as they do in *Louise*, but a girl of the bourgeoisie belongs in a private preserve. You are their property. They can buy you by contract, before a lawyer; you can't

give yourself in the presence of heaven and say, 'It's my right.' Good Lord, where would we end if property revolted against its master and said, 'I am free! Let anyone who wishes come and cultivate me.'"

Even when she was indignant Sylvie could not speak seriously.

Annette smiled and said, "Customs are made by man. I know. He condemns the woman who dares to have her children outside of marriage without dedicating herself for life to the father of her children. But for many women this means slavery, for they do not love their husbands. Many a woman would remain free and alone with her little ones if she had the courage. I shall try to have it."

Sylvie said, with a touch of pity, "Poor innocent! Your life has been shielded from hardships by the double windows of this bourgeoisie that shuts you in with its prejudices—and its privileges also. Once you leave it, you will never be allowed to enter it again, and you will have a glimpse then of what life is!"

"Well, Sylvie, that's only fair; you are right in saying that I have been privileged; it will be good for me to have my share in what you suffer."

"Too late! One must learn that in childhood. At your age it's no longer possible. Luckily you are rich, you will never know material suffering. But the other, moral suffering . . . your class will cast you out, public opinion will condemn you, every day you will have to endure some little insult. . . . You have a proud and tender heart. It will bleed."

"It will bleed, but one enjoys happiness all the more if one has to pay for it. I want nothing but health and an honest mind. Public opinion has no terrors for me."

"But what if your child suffers from it?"

"Would they dare? Well, we shall fight together against the cowards."

Sitting upright again on her bed, she shook her hair like a lioness.

Sylvie studied her, did her best to preserve her look of severity, was unable to do so, laughed, shrugged her shoulders and sighed, "Poor little idiot!"

Annette coaxingly asked her, "Will you help us?"

Sylvie hugged her furiously. And she shook her fist at the wall. "Beware, anyone who touches you!"

She left. Annette, fatigued by the discussion, fell back into her reverie. This time she had won in the encounter with her sister. But one disturbing thing remained from the conversation, one word uttered by Sylvie . . . Would the child some day reproach her? . . .

Stretched out on her back, with her hands crossed over her breast, she listened to what was within her. The tiny creature was beginning to stir. Annette, with her lips closed, spoke to him as she had so often done. She asked him if she was doing right in keeping him for herself alone; she begged him instantly to tell her if she was right, if he was satisfied: for she would do nothing for which he could blame her. Whereupon the child, naturally enough, replied that she was doing right, that he was satisfied. He said he wanted to be hers, hers alone, and that in order to dedicate herself to him she should remain free and live with him alone. She and he. . . .

Annette laughed with happiness. Her heart was so full that she could not speak. And with her head heavy and intoxicated with her joy she fell asleep. . . .

III

As soon as Annette's condition began to be visible, Sylvie obliged her sister to move away from Paris. It was the beginning of autumn; before long her friends would be coming back from their vacations. Surprisingly enough, Annette offered no resistance. She was not afraid of public opinion, but anything that might mean discord just now would have been intolerable to her: nothing must disturb her harmony!

She allowed herself to be conducted by Sylvie to a place on the Côte d'Azure, but she did not stay there. It offered her no peaceful seclusion. The neighborhood of the sea made her feel uncomfortable. Annette was a landswoman. She could marvel at the ocean, but she could not live on familiar terms with it. She submitted to the powerful fascination of its breath, but this breath was not beneficial to her. It reawoke in her too many hidden anxieties; it aroused what she did not wish to be conscious of . . . not yet, not now. . . . There are beings whom we do not love because, they say, we are afraid to love them. (Does that mean we do love them?) Annette fought against the sea because she was fighting against herself, against a dangerous Annette from whom she was trying to escape. . . .

She set out again northward, to the neighborhood of the Savoyard lakes, and took quarters for the winter in a little town at the foot of the mountains. Sylvie was only informed after she was settled. Kept in Paris by her work, she could only make her sister brief, occasional visits, and it troubled her to know that Annette was alone in this forsaken spot. But Annette, during this time, could not

be alone enough, nor could the spot be sufficiently forsaken. She would have found a hermitage delightful. The richer her inner life was, the more need she felt for a clear, soundless atmosphere. She did not suffer, as Sylvie supposed, from being abandoned to strange hands in her condition. In the first place, she had so much affection to give that no one seemed to her a stranger, and, as sympathy attracts sympathy, she did not long remain a stranger to anyone else. It was not that the country-people, who had little curiosity, put themselves out to know her. They bowed back and forth, exchanged a few cordial words as they passed, or from their doorsteps or over the hedges. They wished each other well. Probably in case of need she could not have counted too far on this good will, but, such as it was, it still meant a good deal in the daily round. The days were lighter for it. Annette found the cool kindness of these good souls, of whom she knew nothing and who left her alone, more to her taste than the tyrannical exactions of relatives and friends who assume over us the rights of heavy-handed guardians.

Mid-November. . . . Sitting by the window, sewing, she looked out at the new-fallen snow over the fields and the white-capped trees. But her eyes returned to a wedding announcement. . . . The marriage of Roger Brissot to a young girl of the political world in Paris. (Annette knew her.) . . . Roger had lost no time. The Brissot ladies, angered by Annette's flight, had hastened to bring about another wedding before people should begin to gossip about their son's discomfiture, and Roger, in his resentment, had accepted their choice. Annette could feel no surprise, nor could she complain. She forced herself to think that she was glad for poor Roger's sake.

But the news disturbed her more than she would have wished. So many memories quivered in her soul and her flesh! And there, in that flesh, was the life brought into being by him. . . . In the depths of the shadow, the agitations of those former days were stirring. . . . No, no, Annette would not allow them to come out into the open! She felt an aversion for those fevers of the past. Everything that was sensual wearied her. Disgust, revolt. And that animosity. (She acknowledged it now.) The echo of the ancestral hatred of the female for the male who has fertilized her.

She sewed; she sewed; she wanted to forget. Often when she was nervous and saw a dangerous cloud gathering on the horizon, she had recourse to the prayer-wheel of work. She sewed, and her thoughts slipped back into their proper order.

So they slipped back today. After half an hour of silent application, her anxiety had passed, her smile had reappeared. As Annette lifted the forehead that was bent over her work, her eyes were peaceful and she said, "So be it!"

The sun laughed over the snow. Annette left her work and dressed to go out. Her ankles and her feet were a little swollen and she had to force herself to walk; but once she was outside she found that she enjoyed it. For her little companion was with her as she strolled along. He was making his presence known now. In the evening especially he measured the dimensions of his nest; he groped about in all directions.

"Heavens, how narrow this is!" he seemed to say. "Is it never going to end?"

Then he went to sleep again. By day, when she was out walking, he was well-behaved. But he seemed to

be looking out through his mother's eyes, for to these eyes everything appeared to be new. What fresh colors! Nature had just placed them on the canvas. Annette's cheeks too had a beautiful color. Her heart beat more vigorously and her blood ran. She enjoyed every odor, every taste; when nobody was looking she would eat a little snow by the roadside. Delicious! She remembered that as a child she had done the same thing when her nurse's back was turned. And she sucked the stems of the damp, frozen reeds. She had a shiver of epicurean delight down the whole length of her throat; as the snowflakes melted on her tongue, she too melted with the luxurious pleasure of it.

After she had walked for an hour or two in the country, along the snowy roads, alone yet not alone, alone but with all the company in the world, under the grey canopy of the winter sky, listening to the song of her own springtime, she turned back towards the town, her cheeks whipped red by the cold wind, her eyes shining. Before the baker's window she would yield to the attraction of some dainty made of chocolate or honey. (What a glutton the little fellow was!) Then she would go and sit down, at nightfall, in the church, before an altar, dark and golden like the honey. And she who had no practical religion, no religious faith—or thought she had no faith—would remain there till they closed the doors, dreaming, praying, loving. Night fell; the altar-lamps, faintly swinging, collected the last gleams in the darkness. Annette became stiff, chilly, a little numb in her woolen overcoat as she warmed herself at her own sun. A holy calm was within her. She was dreaming for the child of a life enveloped in sweetness, in silence—in her own loving arms.

IV

On one of the first days of the year the child was born. A boy. Sylvie arrived just in time to welcome him. In spite of her suffering, which drew from her an occasional groan—no tears, Annette, interested, absorbed, was a little disappointed to find, surprisingly, that she was more present at the event than the cause of it. The great emotion she had expected had not appeared. When travail begins, one is caught in a trap. No means of escaping: one has to go through with it. One resigns oneself and bends all one's strength to reach the end as quickly as possible. One's mind is clear, but one's energy is entirely occupied in enduring the pain. One scarcely thinks of the child at all. No room for tender or exalted feelings. Those that have previously filled one's heart vanish. It is truly hard, harsh "labor," a labor of the flesh and the muscles, wholly physical, with nothing beautiful or beneficent about it. Up to the very moment when one's liberation comes, when one feels the little body slip from one's own body . . . At last!

Then, instantly, one's joy returns. With her teeth chattering, worn out, almost collapsing at the bottom of an Arctic ocean, Annette stretched out her cold hands to grasp and press to her own bruised limbs her living fruit—her dearly beloved.

There were no longer two of her now. They were no longer two in one, as before. A fragment of herself was detached in space like a little satellite, drawn by gravity about a star, an additional tiny force the effect of which was immense in the psychic atmosphere. A strange thing that, in this new couple formed by the segmentation of a

being, the larger should depend more for support upon the smaller than the smaller upon the larger. Its wailing cry, through its very weakness, was a source of strength for Annette. Oh, the wealth that comes to us from a loved one who cannot exist without us! Annette, with her stiffened breasts, at which the little animal greedily tugged, eagerly poured into the body of her son the flood of milk and hope with which she was swollen.

Then began to unroll the first touching cycle of the *vita nuova,* that discovery of the world, as old as the world, which every mother experiences again as she bends over the cradle. The tireless watcher awaiting with beating heart the awakening of her Sleeping Beauty. In his sapphire eyes, with their violet depths, Annette found herself reflected—they were so brilliant. What did it see, this gaze, as indefinite and limitless as the great blue eye of heaven—empty or profound, one couldn't say which? And what sudden shadows were cast upon this pure mirror by those clouds of suffering, those invisible furies, those unknown passions, come heaven knows whence! Was it from her past or from his future? The face or the reverse of the same medal. . . . "You are what I have been. I am what you will be. What will you be? What am I?". . . Annette questioned herself in the eyes of her sphinx. And as she observed this consciousness rising hourly from the depths, she lived over again, without realizing it, in this homunculus, the birth of humanity.

One by one little Marc opened his windows to the world. There began to pass over the uniform surface of his liquid stare more definite gleams, like a flock of birds seeking for a place to alight. After a few weeks the flower of a smile appeared on the living shrub. And then the birds that had settled there began to chirp. Forgotten

was the tragic nightmare of the first days, forgotten the terror of the unknown earth, the cries of the being brutally dragged from the maternal shell, cast naked and bruised into the cruel light. The little man was comforted and took possession of life. And he found it good. He explored it, touched and tasted it greedily with his mouth, his eyes, his feet, his hands, his back. He gloried in his prize, playing in astonishment with the sounds that emerged from his pipe. One prize more, his voice! He listened to himself singing. But his singing did not give him more delight than it gave his mother. Annette was intoxicated by it. This little stream of a voice made her heart melt. The shrill cries that rose from the instrument gave her an exquisite pleasure as they pierced her ear.

"Cry louder, my darling! Yes, assert the life that is in you!"

He asserted it with an energy that had no need of encouragement. Joy, anger, whims, he protested them loudly in every key. Annette, who was a novice in motherhood and a scandalously bad educator, found it all charming; she did not have the strength to resist these tyrannical appeals. She would get up ten times during the night rather than hear him groan. And from dawn to dark she let him cling to her breast like a greedy leech. The child could not have been happier, but it was not very good for her.

When she saw her sister again in the spring, Sylvie found her thinner, and she was disturbed. Annette still seemed to be just as happy, but her expression had become a little feverish; the tears came into her eyes at any affectionate word. She admitted that she did not sleep enough, that she did not know how to get proper help, and she felt inadequate before the practical difficulties that arose

in regard to the care and health of the child. She said all this, affecting to laugh at her faint-heartedness, but the fine assurance she had felt at the outset had vanished. She was startled to discover that she was not as robust as she had thought; as she had never been ill, she had not known the limits of her strength, and she believed she could use it uncalculatingly. She realized now that these limits were narrow and that she could not pass them with impunity. What a fragile thing life is! At other times this realization would not have affected her. But now that her life was double, and someone else, even more fragile than herself, depended upon this fragile thing. . . . Heavens, what would happen if she disappeared? During her sleepless nights Annette turned this fear over in her mind many a time. . . . She listened to her sleeping child, and at the least change in its respiration, a slightly quicker breath, a cry or even a silence, her own heart stopped beating. And as soon as this anxiety had once entered it took up its abode in her. Annette no longer knew the solemn, carefree calm of the night hours when the motionless body and the thought-free mind, dreaming without sleeping, floated like water-flowers, motionless, on the nocturnal pond. An Elysian quietude, in which the grace that is granted one is only felt by the heart after it has been lost. Henceforth, the watching soul is distrustful every moment. In the most confident moments apprehension lies concealed.

Sylvie was not mistaken. Under Annette's valiant smile, as she joked about her weakness, she perceived how physically disordered she was, perceived her animal need of joining her own kind again. She decided that Annette should leave her retreat and come back and settle in some house in the country a few hours from Paris where Sylvie

could see her almost every day and the news of her return would not become known. Annette had no objection, but she insisted upon returning boldly to her own house in Paris. She would not hear of any opposition to this. In vain Sylvie pointed out to her that it would be most unwise, that her peace of mind would be endangered. Annette was immovable. Her pride would not endure anything that looked like running away in the face of public opinion. During the happy year when she had been brooding over the child, she had not thought of public opinion. She had lived alone with her happiness; there was no room for a third person. For several months her happiness had not diminished; she would have liked the world to know of it, and it was painful to her to admit to herself that she must hide it. The constant thought of this had hurt her. What, did she have to conceal as something shameful this jewel that was all her pride? She would seem to be denying it!

"Deny you, my treasure!" She kissed him passionately. "I should not have run away. I should have forced people to accept you from the very beginning. But no more of this secrecy! I shall show you to people and say, 'Look at my beautiful baby! You other mothers haven't anything like him, have you?' "

V

She returned to Paris and settled there. The daughter of Raoul Rivière knew very well that it would not be so easy to induce people to accept her situation. But although she had inherited her father's contemptuous attitude towards the world, she had not acquired from him

the habit of yielding outwardly to its prejudices in order to escape from it all the more effectively. She meant to face it down and get the better of it.

Her first experience was favorable enough. In Annette's absence her old Aunt Victorine had remained in charge of the house, as she had done now for many years. This diminutive person of more than sixty had a fresh complexion, unwrinkled cheeks and tight little ringlets close about her face. Calm, gentle, inoffensive, excessively timid, she had kept herself sheltered from everything that might have disturbed her. From her childhood Annette had always seen this Dame Trot of an aunt about the house, looking after all the bothersome domestic duties, seeing that everything was clean and comfortable and watching over the kitchen (for she was an epicure), playing the part of an old family servant for whom, just because she was part of the household furniture, nobody put himself out. Her opinions had no weight; as a matter of fact, she had none. In the course of the thirty years she had passed under her brother's roof Aunt Victorine might have seen and heard strange things. But she had seen nothing, heard nothing. It would have required force to make her see what she did not wish to see. Raoul had taken no precautions. In his circle of intimates he called her the deaf-mute of his seraglio. He made fun of her to her face, fooled her, was rude to her, called her a blockhead, made her cry, and then coaxed her back into a good humor, gave her a noisy smack on both cheeks and induced her to coddle him as if he had been a big boy. She had remembered him as a man with a heart of gold, indeed as a saint—which would have amused him very much in his grave if, for a Raoul Rivière, a tireless lover

of the superficial things of this world, anything that lay beneath had been worth so much as a smile.

It would not have been difficult for Annette to impress upon Aunt Victorine's eyes an equally advantageous image of her personality. She had inherited, along with the house, the worship which the old family tabby rendered to the master. The only thing that was necessary was not to disturb her illusions. Annette hesitated a long time before making up her mind to do so. She had kept her aunt in ignorance of her adventure. In leaving Paris she had used her health and her desire to travel as a pretext. Far as this was from corresponding with the facts, her aunt had appeared to believe it; she was not inquisitive and shrank from hearing anything that might upset her. But, sooner or later, she had to know the truth. Sylvie, after the child's birth, undertook to inform her. The poor woman was completely taken aback. It was very hard for her to understand the situation; she had never been brought face to face with anything of the kind. She sent Annette several frantic letters, so incoherent that Annette might have thought—at her age people have no pity—that Aunt Victorine herself had just had the baby. She consoled her as best she could. Sylvie was convinced that the old lady would leave the house. But to leave the house was the last thought that could have entered Aunt Victorine's head. For the rest, her mind was thrown into the most inextricable confusion. She was quite incapable of giving any advice, for advice was what she herself needed. The only thing she could do was to lament. But one does not live by lamentation, and, as one has to live in spite of everything, she ended by discovering in Annette's misfortune a trial sent by heaven. She was beginning to get used

to it, in the absence of her niece, whose removal kept the disgraceful occurrence at a distance, when Annette announced that she was coming back.

Annette was deeply moved on her return home. Sylvie had come to the station to meet her. Aunt Victorine could not make up her mind to do this; and, when she heard the house-door opening, she precipitately mounted the stairs which she had half descended and ran and shut herself up in her room. There Annette found her in tears. Her aunt, throwing her arms about her, repeated, "My poor child! How is it possible? How is it possible?"

Annette, more disturbed than she wished to appear, assumed an air of assurance and said bluntly, with a laugh, "There will be time enough to explain it all. Let's go down to dinner now."

The old lady allowed herself to be led downstairs. She continued to whimper. Annette said to her, "Hush, hush, dear aunt! You mustn't cry."

Her aunt tried to remember what she had wanted to say. There were a good many things, lamentations, rebukes, questions, exclamations. But out of them all she could extract nothing: nothing emerged but one great sigh after another. Annette took her at once into the presence of the baby, who was sleeping blissfully, its whole little body relaxed and plump, its head thrown back. She fell into an ecstasy and clasped her hands: the old retainer's heart instantly swore fealty to the new head of the house. From this moment, young once more, she attached herself to the chariot of the little god. At times she remembered that, in spite of all, he was an object of scandal, and she found herself in confusion again. Annette, talking with an affected indifference, watched with the corner of her eye the good old face that was growing so long. "Come,

what's the matter?" she asked. "You must give some reason."

Once more Aunt Victorine began her confused lamentations.

"Yes," said Annette, drumming with her fingers. "Yes . . . But, after all, what's to be done? Would you like to have us lose our dear little boy?"

(She knew very well what she was doing in making a point of this coaxing "our.")

Her superstitious aunt, quite upset, protested, "Annette, don't say that. It's dangerous. How can you say such things?"

"Well, then, you mustn't look that way. As long as our little one is here, as long as he has come, what are we going to do about it? What better can we do than to love him and be happy?"

Her aunt might have replied, "Yes, but why should he have come?" But she no longer had the strength to wish him away. Morality might have wished it. The world and religion. Dignity and peace of mind. Peace of mind, above all, perhaps. Her innermost thought, which she did not confess to herself, was, "Heaven help us! If only that unhappy child had not told me anything about it!"

In the end, as it was impossible to reconcile contradictory thoughts, Aunt Victorine ceased to think at all. Abandoning herself to instinct, she became the old hen that has spent her life bringing up the chicks of others. She accepted it.

But Annette had no particular reason to congratulate herself. There are allies who bring more trouble than help. Through her aunt, annoyances from outside speedily began to reach Annette. Madame Victorine was a gossip, and she lent her ear to everything the neighbor-

hood had to say about her niece's return. She would come running home, bathed in tears, to repeat it to Annette. Annette would scold her affectionately, but she could not help being affected by this stupid tittle-tattle. When the old woman came in she would wonder now with a shiver, "What is she going to tell me this time?"

She forbade her to talk. But when her aunt was silent, it was even worse, thanks to what she did not say, her sighs, her look of distress. And Annette was storing up an increasing irritation against this poisonous public opinion which she pretended to ignore.

If she had been prudent she would at least have avoided occasions for coming in contact with it. But she was too much alive to be prudent. People are only prudent when they have suffered from not being so. Human nature is so made that Annette, who contemptuously turned her back on the judgment of the world, burned to know what people were saying behind her back. And, dreading every morning that the day would not pass without bringing her the echo of some disturbing remark, she was ready to go out in search of them when no such remarks came. She was spared the trouble. From her family, from her cousins of both sexes, with whom she maintained only the most distant connection, she received scandalized letters and lectures that she could hardly endure. Their claim to pose as judges of her conduct and champions of the family honor should have seemed less irritating than grotesque to one who, like Annette, had been only too well informed by her father about the secret history of the family and knew how to take the measure of these Aristarchuses. But Annette was in no laughing mood: she would seize her pen and send off a biting reply, which added spite

to their other motives for condemning her and rendered the latter implacable.

These austere censors could invoke as an excuse for their intervention the much abused but still customary rights of relationship. But what rights did strangers have to be severe with her, strangers who were not harmed in any way because she did as she chose with herself? Meeting in the street some amiable society woman in whose drawing-room she had once been received, she would stop to exchange a few civil words. The other, looking her over curiously and letting her talk, scarcely answering herself, would presently pass on with a cold politeness. One woman, to whom Annette had written asking for some information, did not reply. Pursuing her inquiry, Annette wrote to a friend of her mother's, an old lady whom she respected and who had shown some affectionate feeling for herself; she suggested going to see her. In reply came an embarrassed letter, expressing regret that the latter was unable to receive her: she was leaving Paris. These little constantly repeated affronts wounded Annette's sensibility. She was afraid of other rebuffs, but the strange thing was that this fear led her nervously to provoke them.

For example, in the case of her friend Lucile Cordier. The two young women had known each other for a long time. In the society where they moved Lucile was the person whom Annette liked best; and without being very intimate they had always enjoyed seeing each other. Annette learned from her aunt that Lucile's sister was going to be married. She had had no word of this from Lucile. She wrote to congratulate her. Lucile remained silent. Annette knew she ought not to insist. And yet

she did insist, through a strange need of being sure, of suffering.

She went to Lucile's house. There was a sound of voices in the drawing-room. It was her day at home. Annette remembered this just as she entered the room. It was too late to turn back. The conversation was animated. A dozen persons, almost all known to Annette. At her appearance the voices stopped point-blank. Only for a few seconds. Annette, anxious, but feeling that she was committed to a fight, entered. With a smile on her lips, without looking to right or left, she went up to Lucile. Lucile rose, embarrassed. Small and blonde, with half-open, caressing, gentle and yet shrewd eyes, a tired little smile, a mouse-like expression and rather prominent teeth, lively, indifferent to people and ideas while appearing to be devoted to the former and attached to the latter, she was cautious, weak, and not very frank; she liked to please; she was anxious not to fall out with anyone and to get along with everyone. So far as she was concerned, Annette's conduct had not troubled her at all. Her sharp, inquisitive nose, always on the alert, was amused by scandal. The adventure struck her as absurd and would merely have diverted her if, from the worldly point of view, it had not been embarrassing. When Annette wrote to her that she was coming back, Lucile had thought, "What bad luck! How am I going to answer her?"

She did not want to hurt Annette. On the other hand, she did not wish to run the risk of being misjudged. Not being able to think of anything to say in reply, she had put it off from day to day. She expected to see Annette, but later (there was no hurry about it!)—when people would not know about it. This did not prevent her from talking

at Annette's expense and assuming a scandalized air when she was with others.

And now Annette's sudden appearance placed her—("This is too much!")—under the obligation of making an immediate choice. Lucile was much more angry with Annette for playing this mean trick on her than for having had a child. ("Two, if she likes, if she would only leave me alone!")

With a furious little light in her eyes that was quickly extinguished, she took the hand that Annette held out to her, answering her smile with that honeyed smile of her own which Annette knew so well. (No one could resist its tender seductiveness.) It lasted only for a moment. With all those eyes flashing about her, with every ear alert, Lucile at once perceived the irony of the company. Instantly her expression froze; after a few words of welcome she affectedly resumed the interrupted conversation, and with an unexpressed understanding everyone began to talk again.

Annette, left outside the conversation, realized that she was rejected. But she did not accept this at all. She knew the weakness of Lucile's character. Armed with her proud smile, seated in the midst of a group which, without appearing to see her, seemed to be wholly occupied in exchanging words that were as empty as they were lively, she glanced about with her calm eyes at everybody in the room. The glances of the others, meeting hers, turned aside to avoid her. One pair of eyes, however, did not have time to escape. They remained fixed upon her, full of annoyance and spite. Annette recognized the large doll-like face of Marie-Louise de Baudru, the daughter of a rich lawyer, the wife of a judge, whose family had always remained socially on cordial terms with the

Rivières while cherishing towards them a deep-seated antipathy. Marie-Louise de Baudru incarnated in her stout person the most substantial qualities of the upper bourgeoisie: order, probity, the lack of curiosity, of charity, especially of intelligence, all the legal virtues, a firm verbal faith, empty as a butcher's shop of doubts and thought, and the religious worship of propriety, all the proprieties, her family, her property, her country, her Church, her moral code, her tradition and her negations. In short, a massive and compact ego like a block obstructing the sun. No room, near her, for the tub of Diogenes! Nothing was so repugnant to the Baudrus as independence of any kind, religious, moral, intellectual, political or social. A natural aversion! They confounded all its forms under the common taunt of "anarchism." This anarchism they had always suspected in the Rivières. And instinctively Marie-Louise, like the rest of her family, had distrusted Annette. She could not pardon the liberty which Annette had enjoyed in her education and her life as a young girl. There may have been a touch of envy in these unkind judgments. One sole consideration kept her from expressing them, the Rivières' fortune. Wealth commands esteem: it is one of the pillars—the firmest—of the social order. But this is on condition that it does not disturb the basis of everything, the legally established family. The supporters of society are on the watch there: hands off! Annette had struck at the cardinal principles. The watch-dog had awakened, though it held its peace, for it does not bark in society. But its look spoke for it, Annette perceived the bitterest scorn in that of Marie-Louise de Baudru. Her eyes rested calmly on those of her plump judge; and, addressing her with a little familiar bow, she forced her to respond. Marie-Louise,

choking with anger at not being able to resist the injunction, bowed also, avenging herself by giving her coldest look. Annette had already turned indifferently away, and her eyes, which were making the tour of the drawing-room, returned to Lucile.

Quite unembarrassed, she threw herself into the conversation that had begun. She cut into the story Lucile was telling with a general remark and obliged her to reply. They had to make room for her. They could not help listening to her politely, with interest and even pleasure, for she was so witty. But they did not reply, their minds wandered, they talked about other things. The conversation died away, started up again in little bursts, jumping from subject to subject. In the silence Annette heard herself talking in a detached tone, and she listened to her own voice as if it were that of a stranger: true woman that she was, fine, sensitive and proud, she missed none of these little humiliations. Accustomed from childhood to understand and use the equivocal language of drawing-rooms, she could divine, under the veil of deliberate inattentiveness, dubious smiles, disingenuous politeness, the wounds that were intended for her. She was hurt, but she laughed, and she went on talking. The others were thinking, "What poise that girl has!"

Lucile took advantage of the departure of one of the guests to accompany her to the door and escape from Annette. The latter found herself abandoned to a group that had made up its mind to ignore her. Giving up any attempt to prolong the ordeal, she was on the point of rising to leave in turn when, crossing the drawing-room, Marcel Franck approached her. He had come in some time before, though she had not noticed him, for all her attention was occupied by her effort not to yield to the

discouragement that was overcoming her. And as, with a humorous pity, he watched her talking, he admired her pride. He said to himself, "What made you come here and brave these idiots? Crazy little thing! It's enough to wring one's heart."

He decided to lend her a helping hand. He bowed to her pleasantly. Annette's grateful eyes lighted up. Everybody about them became silent, all those hard, watching faces. "Well," he said, "so the globe-trotter is back again. Have you had enough of '*contemplé son azur, ô Méditerranée*'?"

He wanted to turn the conversation to some harmless subject. But what demon drove her on? Pride, the instinct of bravado, or simply frankness? She replied gaily, "So far as the azure is concerned, I have scarcely contemplated anything for months but my baby's eyes."

A little breeze of irony passed over those who were near them. Smiles and glances were discreetly exchanged. But Marie-Louise de Baudru rose indignantly; red, with her stout breast swollen with enough angry contempt to burst her gown, she pushed back her chair and, without bowing to anyone, started for the door and went out. The temperature of the drawing-room fell several degrees. Annette remained alone in her corner with Marcel Franck. He looked at her, sorry for her, half banteringly, and murmured, "You are imprudent."

"How imprudent?" she asked in a clear voice.

She seemed to be looking for something at her feet. Then she rose, without haste, and, coldly bowing and bowed to, went out.

No one who saw her in the street, walking along with her rhythmic step, her head high, her cool, correct, indifferent air, would have suspected the storm of contempt

that was making her wounded heart leap. But, once in the Boulogne house, she shut herself up in her room with the child and pressed him to her with bitter tears. And she laughed defiantly.

VI

There were plenty of interesting houses in Paris where Annette would have been honorably received—especially in the society that should have been familiar to the daughter of Rivière the architect, among those artists who live on the fringe of social Philistia, who, though they are endowed with the traditional family spirit, have no prejudices and carry the bourgeois virtues even into free unions. But Annette had little acquaintance among the women of the artistic world. With a very orderly mind and reserved manners that were anything but Bohemian, she had little taste for their habits and conversation, though she had plenty of respect for their great qualities of courage, good nature and endurance. For it is certainly true that in ordinary life relations are founded much less on respect than on a community of instincts and habits. Besides, Raoul Rivière had long ago dropped his old companions. As soon as his success had permitted him to enter the sphere of wealth and official honors, this man of strong appetites had broken with the *haud aurea mediocritas*. He had been too intelligent not to appreciate the society of men who worked more than that of the Parisian drawing-rooms which he criticized among his intimates with cruel irony, but he had established himself in the latter because it gave him a wider pasturage. He had managed to escape secretly into other and very mixed

circles, where he was able to satisfy his passion for pleasure and his need of unrestrained independence, for he led a double or triple life. But few were aware of this, and his daughter had had no knowledge of anything but his outward and business life.

Annette's social circle was virtually limited to this rich and more or less distinguished upper bourgeoisie which, as a new reigning class, has ended by diligent effort in creating for itself a shadow of tradition. Indeed, along with the other attributes of power, it has purchased the lamp of enlightenment—a lamp, however, that only shines from under a heavy shade and dreads nothing so much as being moved, nothing so much as the enlarging of the illumined circle on the table; for the least change of position threatens to destroy its certitudes. Annette, who instinctively loved the light, had sought for it where she could, in those university studies which in her set were regarded as pretentious. But the light she had found there had been much filtered; it was the light of lecture-rooms and libraries, refracted, never direct. There Annette had acquired a certain boldness of thought that was entirely abstract and did not prevent the best of her comrades from being timid and completely chaotic in the face of reality. Another film was interposed between her eyes and the daylight outside, her fortune. In spite of all she could do, this barrier separated her from the general community. Annette did not suspect how shut in she was. That is the other side of wealth: it is a privileged enclosure, but an enclosure none the less, a garden that is walled in.

And this was not all. Now that she had to leave her circle, Annette, who, for a long time, had fearlessly considered what was awaiting her, did not want to do so.

Let him who disapproves of the illogical condemn her! Man—woman still less—is not all of a piece, especially at those transitional ages when the instincts of revolt and rebirth are mingled with the conservative habits that paralyze them. One cannot at a stroke liberate oneself from the prejudices of one's environment and the needs one has acquired. Even the freest souls cannot do so. One has regrets, doubts, one wants to lose nothing, one wants to have everything. Annette, in her sincerity, with her need of love, with her need of being free, with her desire not to be false, was still anxious not to sacrifice her acquired advantages. She was willing to withdraw from her social set; she could not endure being rejected by it; she could not accept the idea of forfeiting it. And her youthful pride, which life had not yet forced to lower its crest, refused to seek asylum in another environment that was socially more humble, even if she respected it more. This, in the eyes of the world, would have been to admit that she was conquered. It was better to be isolated than *déclassée*.

Trifling as these considerations were, they were not unreasonable. In the struggle between the conventions of a class and one of its revolting members who braves them, the class, which forms a solid block against the imprudent soul as it casts him forth, drives him elsewhere and watches for his weaknesses in order to justify its interdiction.

In the world of Nature as soon as a symptom of weakness appears, and some creature reveals itself as an object of prey, spider-webs are stretched about it. There is nothing unfair about this, nothing sinister. It is merely the natural law. Nature is always hunting. Everyone in turn is hunter or hunted. Annette was the hunted.

The hunters made their appearance. All unsuspecting, Annette received a call from her friend Marcel Franck.

She was alone in the house. The baby had gone out for his daily airing; her aunt was with him. Annette, who was rather tired, was resting in her room. She was not expecting to see anyone, but when Marcel's card was brought to her she gladly sent word for him to come in. She was grateful to him for having taken her part at Lucile's. Not that he had compromised himself. But she had not expected that.

Stretched out in her *chaise longue*, she received him unceremoniously as an old friend. She was still in her morning négligé. Since she had become a mother, she had lost her devotion to order and the meticulous correctness that Sylvie had teased her about. Marcel was the last person to mind this. He found her prettier than ever, with a fresh, attractive plumpness, a gentle languor, a dewy look in her eyes which were softened with happiness. Annette talked quite without reserve; she was pleased to see once more the discerning confidant of her old hesitations. She liked his intelligence, his intellectual tact; he inspired confidence in her. Franck revealed all his old cordiality and fine comprehension, but from the beginning of the conversation she was struck by the suggestion of a new familiarity in his manner.

They recalled their last meeting before Annette's unfortunate visit at the Brissots' in Burgundy, and Annette agreed that Marcel had seen all too clearly what was going to happen. She was anxious to speak of the impossibility of her marriage to Roger, but a blush spread over her face as it occurred to her that Marcel looked at the whole matter in quite a different way and considered it a joke. Marcel remarked mischievously, "You saw it

as well as I." And he laughed at the turn the adventure had taken.

He had the air of being a sort of accomplice. Annette was confused, and she concealed her feeling with a touch of irony. Marcel went a step further: "You saw it much better than I did. We men are absurd enough to believe that we can teach women out of our own precious wisdom, and we get caught instead when, with their insidious voices, their big, beautiful eyes, they anxiously ask us what they ought to do. They know very well. They flatter our folly. We love to teach, but they can give us cards and spades. When I foretold that you would not be caught in the Brissots' net, I never suspected that you would escape from its meshes in such a masterly way. It was a wonderful stroke. Well done! What can't you do when you set your mind on it! I compliment you on your courage." Annette listened to this with a feeling of embarrassment. How strange it was! She had undertaken to vindicate her right to behave as she had done; the other day, at Lucile's, she had been ready to affirm it against the whole universe. But it made her uncomfortable to hear herself praised in this tone by Marcel. Her modesty and her dignity were hurt. "Don't compliment me," she said. "I have less courage than you think. I didn't desire in advance what has happened. I never thought of it."

Then, seized with a scruple and too proud to lie, she continued, "I am mistaken. Yes, I did think of it. But only to fear it, not to desire it. And that is what remains incomprehensible to me. How could I have let it happen, the thing I feared, that I didn't want?"

"Quite natural," said Marcel. "What we fear hypnotizes us. After all, it doesn't follow that because we fear

a thing we don't desire it. But everyone does not dare to do what he is afraid to do. You did dare. You dared to make a mistake. One has to make mistakes in life. We learn through our mistakes, and we must learn. Only, while you were daring, I do think, my friend, that you might have taken precautions. Your partner seems to me very much to blame for having left you with this burden to bear."

Annette, a little shocked, said, "It is not a burden to me."

Marcel supposed that Annette in her generosity wanted to excuse Roger. "You still love him?" he asked.

"Whom?" Annette asked.

"Good!" said Marcel, laughing. "Evidently you don't still love him."

"I love my baby," said Annette. "The rest belongs to the past. And, as for the past, one no longer feels sure that it ever existed. One doesn't understand it any more. It's sad."

"That has its charm too," said Marcel.

"Not for me," said Annette. "I am not a dilettante. But my son is the present, and it is a present that will last longer than I."

"The present that repulses us, the present to which we in turn shall be the past some day."

"So much the worse for me!" said Annette. "Even so, it will be good to be trampled on by his little feet."

Marcel laughed at this passionate outburst. "You can't understand me," said Annette. "You have not seen Marc, my little masterpiece. And even if you saw him, you wouldn't know how to look at him. You are a good judge of pictures, statues, useless knick-knacks. You couldn't judge that unique marvel, the body of a little

child. It would do no good for me to describe him to you."

She did describe him, however, lovingly and at length. She laughed at her own ardent, exaggerated expressions, but she could not keep them back. She broke off as she saw Marcel's indulgent, bantering look. "I am boring you. Excuse me! You don't understand, do you?"

"Of course." Marcel understood. Marcel understood everything. Everyone to his own taste. He would not dispute that.

"In short," he said, "to sum it up, you have blossomed out into maternity. You have flown in the face of public order and the family as established by law. And, far from regretting it, you defy authority."

"What authority?" Annette asked. "I defy nothing."

"Well, then, public opinion, tradition, the Code Napoléon."

"I have nothing to do with all these things."

"That's the worst kind of defiance, the kind people will never pardon. But so be it! You have broken with everything, you have rid yourself of the whole clan. What are you going to do now?"

"Just what I did before."

Marcel looked sceptical.

"What, do you think I can't live as I used to do?"

"It would hardly be worth while. And besides . . ."

Marcel unhappily recalled the call at Lucile's: if she wished to resume her old place in society Annette would meet with little success. She knew this: it was unnecessary for anyone to tell her, and in her wounded pride she had no desire to repeat the experience. But she was surprised by Marcel's insistence in pointing this out to her; he was usually more tactful.

"Well," she said, "it matters very little now that I have my child."

"But you can't reduce your existence merely to him."

"I don't think that would be reducing it. Enlarging it, I should say. I see a world in him, a world that is going to grow. I shall grow with it."

With much solicitude and no less irony, Marcel set to work to prove to her that this world would not be enough for a nature as eager and exacting as hers. With knitted brows and a pang at her heart Annette listened to him. Mentally, in her irritation, she protested, "No, no!"

She could not help being anxious, however, when she remembered that once before Marcel had had such clear foresight. But why was he so bent upon convincing her of it? Why should he take so much trouble to prove to her that she should profit by the liberty she had won, that she should not be afraid of living on the fringe of society? (He called it "outside and above the bourgeois conventions.")

There were in Annette two or three Annettes who always bore one another company. As a general thing, only one spoke while the others listened. Just now two of them were speaking at once: the passionate, sentimental Annette who was the victim of her impressions and their willing dupe, and another who observed and was amused at the hidden motives of the heart. She had good eyes. She saw through Marcel. They had changed places. Formerly it had been he who read her secret thoughts. Today, today there had come to Annette (just when?—exactly from the moment of her 'metamorphosis') an insight into souls and their secret movements—intermittent,

to be sure—the novelty of which surprised and amused her in the midst of her anxieties.

Stretched out in her chair, with her head thrown back, her arms behind her neck and her mouth slightly open, she studied the ceiling; but out of the corner of her half-closed eyes she watched Marcel as he talked. She could have uttered in advance the words he was about to say; she could have sworn what was going to happen. With an amused curiosity that was a little sarcastic, for which she reproached herself, she let him go on.

(One must see and know, as he said just now, one must learn . . . learn. . . .)

She was learning to understand a friend.

(Yes, I understand you. . . . An Annette fallen from the tree would be good to pick up again. He is gently shaking the tree to make her tumble off. He is speculating on Annette's confusion. And yet he is in love with her. Yes, he is certainly in love with her. Not very bright, brother man! His voice begins to have a coaxing sound. See how tender he is growing. And now, look out! I wager he is going to bend over me.)

Several seconds in advance she foresaw Marcel's blond beard leaning towards her; she foresaw the caressing mouth that was about to alight on hers. She wanted to spare him the humiliation. And just at the exact moment she rose, and, with her outstretched hands, gently pushed Marcel's shoulders away.

"Good-bye, my friend," she said.

Marcel looked into those penetrating eyes that were scrutinizing him with a little malice in their depths. He smiled. He had been mistaken. But it had been a good battle. He was perfectly aware that, with all the calm-

ness in the world, he had been given his dismissal. And yet, of this he was sure, Annette's feeling towards him was not one of indifference. Let whoever could understand it! The strange girl was escaping him.

VII

Marcel did not reappear, and Annette took no steps to bring him back. They were still friends, but each was angry with the other. Just because Annette's feeling towards Marcel was not one of indifference, she was touched by what she had seen in him. She was not offended by this; it was the old story . . . Too old a story! . . . No, Annette had no grievance against Marcel. Only, only she could not forget what had happened! That is the way it is with forgivenesses granted by the mind which the heart does not ratify. Secretly bitter, she was forced to recognize, even more through Marcel's too free attempt than through the harsh welcome she had encountered in Lucile's drawing-room, that her situation was changed. She realized that she was no longer protected by the conventional consideration that society accords to those of its members who appear to submit to its laws. She would have to defend herself alone. She was exposed.

She closed her door to the world. She took care not to tell Sylvie of the experiences she had had; Sylvie had predicted them and she would be triumphant. She kept her secret and shut herself up with her child. She had decided henceforth to live only for him.

When little Marc came back from his airing in the evening, after Marcel's call, she welcomed him with

transports. He laughed when he saw her and stretched out to her his four wriggling paws. She fell on him as a starved wolf falls on its prey; she devoured him with kisses; she pretended to eat every morsel of his body; she thrust his little feet into her mouth; and as she undressed him she tickled him from head to foot with her lips. "Yum-yum! I'm going to eat you up! That fool!" she exclaimed, calling him to witness. "That fool who had the impudence to tell me that you would not be enough for me! What insolence! You not enough for me, my king, my little god! Tell me that you are my little god! And what am I then? The little god's mother! The world belongs to us! All the things we are going to do together! See everything, have everything, try everything, taste everything, create everything!"

And indeed they did create everything. To discover and to create, are they not the same thing? To invent is to find. One finds what one invents, one discovers what one creates, what one dreams of, what one draws up from the fish-pond of one's musings. For the two of them, mother and child, it was the hour of great discoveries. The first words of the little boy, the game of exploration, when one measures the world with one's arms and legs. Every morning Annette, with her child, set out for conquest. She enjoyed it as much as he, perhaps more. It seemed to her that she was reliving her own childhood, but with complete consciousness and complete joy. He, the gay little soul, was full of joy too. He was a beautiful child, healthy, chubby all over, a little pink pig just ready for the spit. ("What else could you expect?" as Sylvie said.) In his plump, elastic body there was too much compressed force; he was like a rubber

ball that insists upon bouncing. Every new contact with life threw him into a clamorous delight. The enormous power of dreaming that belongs to every baby amplified his discoveries and prolonged the vibrations of happiness into veritable chimes of bells. Annette was never behind him; it was as if they were having a contest as to who should be the happiest and make the most noise. Sylvie said that Annette was crazy, but she would have behaved the same way herself. And after this tumult they would both have hours of absolute, delicious, exhausted silence. The little one, tired out after so much movement, slept obliviously. Annette was dropping with fatigue, but for a long time she would refuse to go to sleep in order to enjoy the other's slumber; and the fire of her love, driven back into her heart, hidden like the light of a candle behind one's hand so as not to awaken the little sleeper, burned with a long silent flame that rose upward to heaven. She prayed . . . Mary beside the manger . . . She prayed to the child.

These months were still beautiful and shining. But they were not as pure as those of the previous year. Less limpid. They were full of an exalted, excessive joy that was a little exaggerated.

A vigorous, healthy nature like Annette's must create, perpetually create, create with its whole being, body and spirit. Create, or else brood over the creation that is to be. It is a necessity, and happiness comes only through satisfying it. Every creative period has its own limited field, and its rising force follows a trajectory that descends again sharply. Annette had passed the summit of the curve. Nevertheless, the transport of creation persists in the mother for a very long time after childbirth. Suckling prolongs the transfusion of the blood, and in-

visible bonds keep the two bodies in communication. The creative abundance of the spirit of the infant compensates for the impoverishment of the spirit of the mother. The river that is running out tries to replenish itself from the stream that is flowing over. It becomes a torrent so as to merge with the little torrent. But strive as it may, the little one outruns it. The child was already withdrawing into the distance. Annette had difficulty in following him.

Before he was able to frame a complete sentence he already had his little hidden thoughts, cupboards of which he kept the keys. Heaven knew what he concealed there: his reflexions on people, his scraps of reasoning, odds and ends of images, sensations, play-words the sound of which amused him, though he did not know what they meant, a singing monologue that had no sequence, no end, no beginning. He was perfectly well aware, perhaps not of what he was hiding, but that he was hiding something. For the more one tried to find out what he was thinking, the more mischievously he refused to let one know. He even amused himself sometimes putting one off the track; with his little tongue, which was as clumsy as his hands, as it stumbled about among the syllables, he was already trying to lie, to mystify people. It was a pleasure to prove his own importance to others and to himself by making fun of those who tried to penetrate into his private domain. This scrap of a being, scarcely born, had the fundamental instinct of the *mine* that is not yours—of "You shan't have any of my peanuts." His whole wealth lay in fragments of thoughts: he built walls to hide them from his mother's eyes. And she, with that lack of foresight which is common to all mothers, was proud that he knew so well how to say the No with which

he so early manifested his personality. She haughtily proclaimed, "He has a will of iron."

She thought she had forged this iron herself. But against whom?

Against herself, to begin with; for, in the eyes of this little ego, she was the not-I, the external world, a habitable external world, of course, warm, soft and milky, that one could exploit, that one wanted to dominate. External to the I . . . I am not it. I possess it. But it does not possess me!

No, she did not possess him! She began to feel it; this Lilliputian intended to belong to no one but himself. He needed her, but she needed him: the child's instinct told him so. In all probability, this instinct, guarded by his egocentricity, told him that she needed him much more and that it was therefore quite fair for him to abuse it. And, heaven knows, this was true: she did need him much more.

"Well, fair or not, abuse me, little monster! Just the same, it's no use, you can't get along without me for a long time yet. I hold you. There, I plunge you into your bath. Protest, young carp! . . . He looks insulted; his mouth is open, as if this little personage were choking with indignation at being treated like a bundle. . . . And I turn you and turn you again! Heavens, what music! You are going to be a singer, my son. Well, cry out your do-re-me. Bravo! You do the singing, but it's I who make you dance. . . . Isn't it a shame for me to abuse your weakness in this way? Oh, how mean this mother is! Poor midget! Well, you'll avenge yourself on her when you are grown up. Meanwhile, protest! In spite of your dignity, look, I'm going to kiss you on your little behind."

He kicked. She laughed. But it was in vain she held him; she held only the shell. The animal within escaped into his burrow. Every day he became more difficult to grasp. It was a loving chase, a passionate struggle. But it was a struggle, a chase. One had to keep one's wind.

The thousand little regular attentions that a baby demands fill the days. Simple, monotonous as they are, they do not allow one to think of anything else. Aside from *him*, always *him*, one's mind is in shivers. The swiftest thought is interrupted ten times over. The child invades everything; this little mass of flesh blocks one's horizon. Annette did not complain. She did not even have time to regret it. She lived in a plenitude of busy fatigue that was a blessing to her at first, but that gradually became an obscure weariness. One's strength is used up, one's soul wanders aimlessly: it does not stay where one has left it. It follows its way like a sleep-walker, and when it awakens it does not know where it is. Annette woke up one day conscious of a load of fatigue that had been accumulating for months, and an indefinable shadow mingled with the joy that dwelt in her.

She was unwilling to attribute this to anything but physical exhaustion; and to prove to herself that her happiness was in no way altered she manifested it in more clamorous effusions than were necessary. Especially before others, as if she were afraid that they would discover in her what she did not wish to be seen. This exaggerated gaiety was followed later, when she was alone, by depression. Sadness? No. An obscure uneasiness, a vague restlessness, the feeling, which she repressed, of a partial dissatisfaction. Not that she expected anything from outside (she could still get along without that), but she suffered from the unemployment of a part of her nature.

Certain forces of the mind had been at a standstill for a long time; the economy of her being had undergone a disturbance. Annette, deprived of society, driven back upon herself alone and feeling the sting of a nostalgia that she tried to stifle, tried to find a resource in the company of books. But the volumes remained open at the same page; the brain had become unaccustomed to the effort of following the unfolding chain of the words; the continual breaks which the constant preoccupation with the child made in her thought dislocated her attention and shook it, somnolent and enervated as it was, as a moored ship dances on the current without the power either to advance or to remain still. Instead of reacting, Annette remained shut up in herself, musing drowsily over the open book; or she tried to divert herself in a flood of passionate nonsense with the child. Sylvie, who saw that she could not find expression for her multiple energy with the little one, said to her, "You should go out more, take exercise, walk as you used to do."

For the sake of peace, Annette said she would go out, but she did not budge. She had a reason which she kept to herself: she was afraid of meeting her old friends and exposing herself to some slight, some coldly distant greeting. A superficial reason which she gave herself. In former times she would have ignored these petty offences, but now she had a neurasthenic tendency to avoid all contacts. Then why not leave Paris and live in the country, as Sylvie advised? She did not say she would not, but she did nothing; it involved making a decision, and she was not willing to stir from her torpor.

So she allowed her motionless days to float along, without a wave, like a becalmed sea that is preparing to ebb. An interlude, an apparent arrest in the eternal rhythm of

respiration: the breath is suspended. Joy is tiptoeing away. Trouble is approaching on muffled feet. The trouble has not yet come. But a *nescio quid* warns one: "Do not move!" It is waiting outside the door.

VIII

It entered. But it was not what she had expected. It is useless to attempt to foresee happiness or trouble. When they arrive they are never what we have looked for.

One night when, suspended between sky and sea, on the borders of happiness and melancholy, Annette was skirting the cape of sleep, without knowing whether she was on this side of it or that, she became aware of a danger. Unaware whence it was coming or what it was, she collected her strength to fly to the help of the child who was sleeping near her. For already her consciousness, which never slept without one ear open, had realized that he was threatened. She forced herself to awaken and listened anxiously. She was not mistaken. Even when she was sound asleep the slightest alteration in the breathing of the dear little creature reached her. The respiration of the child was hurried; by a mysterious osmosis, Annette felt the oppression in her own chest. She turned on the light and leaned over the cradle. The little one was not awake; he was sleeping uneasily; his face was not red, which seemed to the mother a reassuring symptom; she touched his body, found the skin dry, the extremities cold; she covered him more warmly. This seemed to quiet him. She watched him for a few minutes, then turned out the light, trying to persuade herself that the alarm would not

be repeated. But after a brief respite the hoarse breathing began again. Annette deceived herself as long as she possibly could. "No, he is not breathing harder or more quickly. It's only that I am agitated."

As if her will could impose itself upon the child, she forced herself to remain motionless. But it was no longer possible to doubt. The oppression was increasing, the breath came more quickly. And with a fit of coughing the child woke up and began to cry. Annette leaped out of bed. She took the child in her arms. He was burning, his face was pale, his lips were blue. Annette was distracted. She called Aunt Victorine, who only added her own agitation to the scene. That very day the telephone had been disconnected for repairs, and there was no way of communicating with the doctor. There was no druggist in the neighborhood. The Boulogne house was isolated; the maid was unwilling to run through the deserted streets at this hour of the night. They would have to wait for morning. And the sickness was growing worse. It was enough to make one lose one's head. Annette very nearly did so; but knowing that she must not she did not. Her aunt, whimpering, fluttered like a fly about the globe of a lamp. Annette said to her harshly, "It does no good to groan. Help me! Or, if you can't do anything, go to sleep and leave me alone. I will save him by myself."

Her aunt, petrified by this, recovered her composure; her long experience as a watcher at sickbeds dispelled Annette's most terrible apprehension, that of diphtheria. Annette retained an unspoken doubt; so did her aunt. One may always be mistaken. And even if it was not diphtheria, there were so many other mortal disorders. Not to know what it was added still more to their fright. But whether or not Annette's heart was frozen with ter-

ror, her movements were calm and just what they should have been. Without knowing it, moved by the maternal instinct alone, she did exactly the right thing for the child. (So the doctor told her the next day.) She did not leave him lying on his back for long, she changed his position, she struggled against his fits of suffocation. What neither experience nor science could have taught her the love within her dictated, for she suffered what he suffered. She suffered more. She regarded herself as responsible for it.

Responsible! The tension of an ordeal, especially of an illness that strikes a beloved being, often creates a superstitious state of mind in which one needs to accuse oneself for the suffering of the innocent one. Annette not only reproached herself for not having watched over the child, for having been imprudent with him, but she discovered that she had criminal thoughts in the back of her mind: a passing weariness of the child, the shadow of an unconfessed regret that her life should have been swamped in his. Was it quite certain that she had really felt and repressed this regret, this weariness? No doubt, since they emerged at this moment. But who could say whether she had not invented them through this need she felt, when she was powerless to act in a practical way, to act in thought, even if it meant turning her desperate energies against herself?

She turned them also against the great Enemy, against the unknown God. As she saw the little swollen face, as she breathed her breath into him, softly raising him in her hands with careful movements, she passionately asked his pardon for having brought him into the world, stolen him away from peace, thrown him into this life a prey to suffering, to mischance, to the evil hazards of heaven knew

what blind master! And with her flesh creeping, like an animal at the entrance of his burrow, she growled, she sniffed the approach of the great murderous deities; she prepared to fight with them for her child, she bared her teeth. Like every mother whose child is threatened, she was the eternal Niobe who, in order to turn the mortal shaft against herself, hurls her furious defiance at the Murderer.

But no one in Annette's household divined this silent battle.

In the morning the doctor came; he complimented her on her presence of mind and the first steps she had taken—so different from what sometimes happens when an anxious affection spoils everything by its awkwardness. But she only grasped from his words what he said about the epidemics of grippe and measles that were raging in Paris and the possibility that her child had caught the germs of bronchial pneumonia. In refusing to leave Paris, as she had promised to do, she had thus been guilty towards the child. She judged herself pitilessly. This sentence she passed on herself had at least the advantage of limiting the field of her responsibility, for it dispelled any other remorse.

At the first news, Sylvie had arrived hastily, and the little patient had plenty of attention. But Annette, refusing to leave her place, took hardly any rest and remained in the breach during the days, the nights, the days. The perspiration on the little body and its burning suffocation melted her own being. The illness kneaded them into one mass. The child seemed to be aware of this, for in the moments when the fear of an attack of coughing contracted his sides his eyes rested, heavy with reproaches and an appeal for help, on the eyes of the mother. He

seemed to be saying, "It's going to hurt me again! There it is coming back! Save me!"

And, pressing him to her, she would reply, "Yes, I shall save you! Don't be afraid, it's not going to get you!"

The attack came, and the child strangled. But he was not alone. She stiffened with him in order to break the noose. He felt that she was struggling, that she, the great protectress, would not abandon him; and the reassuring sound of her gentle voice and the pressure of her fingers gave him confidence, said to him, "I am here."

As he cried and struck the air with his little arms, he knew she would fight it.

And she did fight it, the nameless thing. The illness yielded. The noose relaxed. And the little birdlike body of the child, still palpitating, abandoned itself to the hands that had saved it. How good it was to breathe, the two of them, after that plunge into the depths! The wave of air that streamed through the mouth of the child bathed the throat of the mother and swelled her breasts with an icy pleasure.

These respites were of short duration. The struggle continued, alternating with periods of exhaustion. His condition was improving when the child had a sudden relapse from some unknown cause. His faithful watchers naturally tormented themselves all the more, accusing themselves of some moment of forgetfulness that had threatened his recovery. Annette said to herself, "If he dies, I shall kill myself."

For many nights she had been used to going without sleep; she kept it up as long as the child needed her aid, but during the hours when he slept and her own mind, reassured, might have made the most of this and relaxed, her spirit was more uneasy than ever. It vibrated like a

telegraph-wire in the wind. Impossible to close her eyes. It was dangerous for her to lie there facing her distracted brain. Annette would turn on the light again and try to fix her mind upon some definite line of thought in order to escape from this vertigo. But it was only to turn over and over all sorts of superstitious, childish, extravagant ideas—or so they appeared to a mind that was accustomed to rational methods. She told herself that if calamity hung over her it was because she had been too completely happy, and it seemed to her that if her son was to recover she must suffer in some other direction. An obscure, powerful belief in some painful compensation, mounting up from the depths of time. Primitive peoples, in order to placate the ferocious bargaining god, the god who never gives something for nothing and demands cash payments, used to sacrifice their first-born: they purchased with this ransom the safety of the rest of their fortunes. And for her first-born Annette would gladly have given her life and all her wealth.

"Take my all," she said, "but let him live!"

Then at once she thought, "This is absurd. Nobody is listening to me."

It was no use. The old atavistic instinct continued to scent, somewhere about her, the presence of the jealous God. And, holding on, bargaining bitterly, she said, "Let us make an agreement. I am willing to pay on the spot. The child is mine. Take your choice of the rest!"

As if to justify her superstition, events took Annette at her word. One morning, when Aunt Victorine had gone to the lawyer's to get some money that he should have sent them some time before, she came back in tears. That very morning Annette had had the joy of being finally

reassured about her child's health. The doctor had just left: this time he had announced that the child was definitely convalescent. Annette, in a transport of happiness, but still trembling, hardly dared to believe in her newly recovered happiness. At this moment she saw the door opening and at the first glance perceived her aunt's broken look. Her heart throbbed as she thought, "What new misfortune has befallen us?"

The old lady could hardly speak. At last she said, "The office is closed. M. Grenu has disappeared."

Annette's whole fortune was in his charge. For a moment she did not understand. Then—explain it if you can—her face cleared. She was relieved. She thought, "Is that all?"

So there it was, the saving calamity! The enemy had taken his portion.

A moment afterward she shrugged her shoulders at her silliness. But in spite of her irony she continued to say to it, "Was that enough? Are you satisfied? Now that I have paid, I owe you nothing more."

She smiled. Poor humanity, clutching at its morsel of happiness and seeing it unceasingly, unceasingly escaping, tries to conclude a pact with blind nature, which it creates in its own image.

"In my image? This envious, rapacious, cruel nature. Is it possible that I resemble it? Who knows? Who can say, 'I am not that'?"

IX

Annette was ruined. She could not yet estimate the extent of her ruin. But when the first moment of aberra-

tion had passed, when she coldly examined the situation, she had to admit that she thoroughly deserved it.

She was quite capable of attending to her affairs. Like her father, she had a good hard head; figures had no terrors for her. When one comes of a line of peasants and shrewd, energetic tradesfolk, one must make an actual effort to lose one's assurance in practical matters. But she had been spared all thought about material things as long as her father was alive; and since then she had passed through a long crisis in which the inner travail of her emotional life had held her captive. In this rather abnormal state, maintained by the idleness made possible by her fortune, she had felt a rather unhealthy disgust at paying any attention to her property. It should be said boldly that the idealism of the inner life which despises money as parasitical forgets that it has the right to do so only when it gives up money. The idealism that grows out of a soil of wealth and professes to have no interest in it is the worst form of parasitism.

To escape from the boredom of managing her fortune, she had turned the whole administration of it over to the excellent M. Grenu, her lawyer. An old family friend, a respected man whose honor and professional standing were well known, M. Grenu had for thirty years overseen all the Rivières' affairs as they passed through his office. It was true that Raoul had not allowed any one to manage them without consulting him. However much confidence he may have placed in his lawyer, he never allowed him to make out a deed without verifying every period and comma himself. But after taking all precautions, he did have confidence in him, and when a man of his shrewdness has confidence in another the other must deserve it.

M. Grenu did deserve it. As much as anybody in the world (when the precautions were taken) . . .

The rôle of lay confessor, which the lawyer is called upon to play in a family, had placed M. Grenu in possession of many of the Rivières' household secrets. He had been unaware of very few of Raoul's escapades or Mme. Rivière's sorrows. To the former he had lent a sympathetic ear, to the latter an ear equally complacent. As an advisor of the wife he appreciated her virtues; as the companion of Raoul, he appreciated the latter's vices (they were virtues too, Gallic virtues); and it was said that he was not above joining in some of Raoul's select parties. M. Grenu was a little grizzled man in his sixties, delicate in appearance, with a fresh complexion, excessively correct, malicious and smooth-tongued, a good fellow, an amusing actor; he liked to tell stories and would begin in a low, faint voice so that people would take pains to listen to him, a voice so soft that it seemed to be dying; then, when he had won from the audience a pitying silence, he would gradually spread out into a sonorous volume of sound that a big clarinet might have envied, and he would not abandon the stop till the final note when he had finished his song. He was a lawyer of the old school, but a weak man, attracted by the new ways, a good paterfamilias, an old-fashioned bourgeois, proud of being able to count a number of actresses, high livers and light women among his clientele, and it was his hobby to speak of himself as old and even to act so, exaggeratedly; but he was very much afraid of being taken at his word and in secret applied himself ardently to showing that he was livelier than all these young folks and could leave them far behind.

He had known Annette since her childhood, and he had taken her affairs very sincerely to heart. It seemed to him natural that she should confide in him after the death of her parents. With professional correctness, at first, he had scrupulously kept her posted; he was unwilling to do anything without her consent—which only bored Annette. Then he induced her to give him a special power of attorney for this or that transaction of which Annette heard (scarcely heard) a very vague account. And finally it was taken for granted that, since Annette made frequent trips away from Paris, often without leaving her address, M. Grenu would look out for her interests as best he could without consulting her. Thus everything went well: the lawyer took charge of everything, collected Annette's income and provided her with money as she needed it. At last, in order to regularize the situation, he caused her to give him a general power of attorney. . . . Water flowed under the bridges. . . . It was more than a year since Annette had seen M. Grenu, who, punctually, at the beginning of each quarter, turned over to her the amount that was due. Living alone, away from Parisian society, no longer reading the newspapers, she did not hear of events until long after they had happened. Old M. Grenu had tried to be too clever. Without any personal spirit of greed, he had allowed himself to be caught by his fondness for speculation; to increase the funds of his clients, he involved them in risky enterprises in which they were capsized. Then in his attempts to make up their losses he ruined them. Without warning Annette, he had not only disposed of all her ready money and the personal property of which he had charge, but, by certain subterfuges that were permitted by the elastic form of the power of attorney, he had mortgaged the

Boulogne house and the house in Burgundy. When all was lost he fled before the ridicule which he knew would follow his downfall and which would perhaps have been more intolerable to him than dishonor.

To crown the misfortune, Annette, entirely absorbed in the child's illness, had not opened her correspondence for several weeks. She had not replied to the letters of the mortgage-holders or the court summons that followed. It was during the days of the child's relapse. Annette had lost her head. Not realizing that they were addressed to her and not to her agent, she sent the papers off without reading them to the lawyer, who did not read them either—for a good reason. He was on the run. When at last the recovery of her child left her mind free enough to examine the situation, the judicial procedure had advanced so far that, in Annette's failure to satisfy the demands of the creditors, the latter had won the right to have the mortgaged property put up for sale. Annette, awakened from her torpor, had to face this stunning blow; with the energy that was restored in an instant and the practical intelligence, inherited from her father, that made up for her inexperience, she fought with a vigor and a clearness of mind which the judge admired even while he decided against her: for her good excuses did not alter the fact that before the law her case was bad. Annette herself saw at once that she had lost in advance, but her fighting instinct, which coolly admitted her defeat, unjust as it was, could not admit it without resistance. Besides, she was concerned now for her child's property. She defended it, step by step, with the tenacity of a rude, shrewd peasant who, bracing her legs at the gate of her field, bars the road to intruders, trying to gain time even though she knows they are coming in. But what could she do? In

her inability to pay the sum that was demanded, and not wishing to ask aid from her relatives or from the old friends who would probably have refused it in some humiliating way, she could not stop the sale. Her ingenious, stubborn energy only succeeded in obtaining the suspension, for a limited time, of the proceedings of expropriation, without any hope of preventing their execution after a brief delay.

Annette would have had some excuse if she had been overwhelmed by this catastrophe. Sylvie, who had not been personally injured by it, now burst into lamentations, now angrily talked of nothing but law-suits, law-suits, law-suits. Annette, on the contrary, seemed to have recovered her equilibrium through this very event. The ordeal had cleared the air. The soft, sentimental atmosphere that for two or three years had been cloying her heart was dissipated. When Annette was certain that the situation could not be changed, she accepted it. Without useless recriminations. Unlike Sylvie, who heaped the harshest maledictions on the lawyer's head, she found no comfort in blaming M. Grenu. The old man was in the water. So was she. But she had her youthful arms, and she could swim. Perhaps this thought was not even entirely unpleasant to her. Strange as it may seem, along with the distress of her ruin she had at bottom an inquisitive desire for adventure and even a secret pleasure in putting her unused energies to the test. Raoul would have understood her, Raoul who, at the height of his success, had been seized at moments with a fancy for destroying his life's work just to have the pleasure of rebuilding it.

She prepared now to leave the Boulogne house. The property in Burgundy had already been sold, hastily, on absurd terms. It was certain that the total sale would

scarcely cover the debt and the costs, and that, if there remained an available surplus, it would not be enough for the maintenance of Annette and her family; she would have to look for new resources. For the moment, the main thing was to reduce expenses and settle in some very modest establishment. Annette set out to look for an apartment. Sylvie found one for her on the fourth floor of her own house. (She lived on the *entresol.*) The rooms were small and opened on the court, but they were clean and quiet. It was impossible to bring all the furniture from the Boulogne house here. Annette wanted to keep only what was absolutely necessary. But Aunt Victorine, weeping, begged her to preserve everything. Annette remonstrated that it was not reasonable, in their present situation, to assume the expense of a storeroom. They must make a choice, and the old lady begged for each object. Annette firmly chose; aside from the furniture that was to follow them to the new apartment, she kept a few pieces that were particularly dear to her aunt, and the rest were sold.

Sylvie was struck by Annette's insensibility. But it was impossible to suppose that the courageous girl did not feel a little sad. She loved this house which she had to leave. . . . How many memories she had! How many dreams! But she repressed them. She well knew that she could not entertain them with impunity. They were too much, they would have taken everything; she needed all her strength at this moment.

Just once, taken by surprise, she gave way before their assault. It was one afternoon, shortly before the movers were to come. Her aunt was at church and Marc was at Sylvie's. Annette, alone in the Boulogne house, where everything spoke of their approaching departure, was

kneeling on a half-rolled rug, folding up a tapestry that had been taken down. Occupied with her task, while her active hands came and went, her head was busy calculating about the new arrangements. But she still had room for dreams; for her eye, floating for an instant far from the present vision, fastened in its mistiness upon a design in the tapestry which her hands were rolling up: it recognized this design. A motif of pale flowers, almost worn away; butterflies' wings, detached petals? It mattered little; but Annette's eyes as a child had fallen there, and on this canvas they had embroidered the tapestry of the days that had fled. And this tapestry had suddenly emerged from the night. Annette's hands ceased to wander; her mind, for one moment more, persisted in repeating the figures of which it had lost the thread, then was still. And Annette, letting herself slip down upon the floor, with her forehead on the roll of the rug and her face in her hands, lay there with her knees drawn up, abandoned herself to the wind and the flood, set sail. . . . She did not voyage towards any particular country. . . . Such a mass of memories—lived? dreamed?—how distinguish between them? Dizzy symphony of a moment of silence! It contained much more than the substance of a life. In active thought, the consciousness, when it believes it takes possession of our inner world, only seizes the crest of the wave at the moment when the sun-ray gilds it. Reverie alone perceives the moving abyss and its torrential rhythm, those innumerable drops, scudding along on the wind of the ages, seeds of thought of the beings from whom we spring and who will spring from us, that formidable chorus of hopes and regrets whose trembling hands stretch out towards the past or the future. Indefinable harmony that forms the tissue of an illumi-

nated second, and that sometimes a shock is enough to awaken. A bouquet of pale flowers had just evoked it in Annette.

When she pulled herself together, after a long silence, she rose hastily, and with hands that were suddenly awkward, hasty, trembling, she finished folding up the tapestry without looking at it. She did not quite finish it, she threw it into a box, incompletely rolled, and fled from the room. . . . No, she did not want to stay with these thoughts! It was better to escape from them. Later she would have time enough to regret the past, when she would herself belong to the past . . . later, in the twilight of her life. For the moment, she was too full of the future, she must see it through. Her dreams lay ahead of her. "I don't want to know what is behind me; I must not turn around."

She walked down the street, hastening her steps, tense, looking neither to right nor left . . . the years, the years, the life that was coming . . . that of her child, her own, the new life, the Annette of to-morrow.

X

She had this vision in her eyes on the evening when she established herself in Sylvie's house. Sylvie, as soon as her shop was closed, hastened to climb up to her sister's apartment to distract her from the regrets she supposed the latter must be feeling. She found her walking back and forth in her narrow room, not at all tired after the exhausting day, trying to make her too diminutive cupboards hold her clothes and her linen. Unsuccessful in this, perched on a stool, with her arms full of sheets, look-

ing at the filled shelves, she was meditating another plan, whistling like a boy a Wagnerian fanfare that she absent-mindedly travestied, giving it a burlesque turn. Sylvie looked at her and said, "Annette, I admire you." (She did not mean quite as much as this.)

"Why?" asked Annette.

"If I were in your place, how I should rage!"

Annette began to laugh. Absorbed in her work, she made a sign to her sister to be silent.

"I think I've got it," she said.

She buried her head and her arms in the cupboard, arranging, disarranging, rummaging.

"I said so," she remarked, "and I have."

(She was addressing a cupboard that was full, arranged, conquered.)

She descended, victorious, from the stool.

"Rage, Sylvie?" she said. (She was holding her by the chin.) "When you were a child you played at building houses with dominoes. When the house fell, did you get angry?"

"I banged the dominoes on the floor," said Sylvie.

"And I said, Biff! I'll build another."

"You'll have to admit that you shook the table!"

"Well, I wouldn't swear I didn't," said Annette.

Sylvie called her an anarchist.

"What!" said Annette. "Isn't that just what you are?"

Sylvie was not. She could laugh at order and authority when she wanted to do so, but she felt the need of order and authority. Even if it was only to apply them to other people. For her, as for others, there was no pleasure in revolting unless it was against some authority. And as for order, Sylvie was well supplied with it. She did not cavil at the established order except in so far as it was not

her own. She did not reproach it for being established. An order should be established. Since she too was established, as an employer, directing her own business, she was all for a stable order. Annette made this discovery with surprise. Nor was this the only discovery she made. You do not know another human being unless you see him in that everyday activity which brings his energies to a head and reveals his natural movements and gestures. Annette had never seen Sylvie except during her idle times, her times of relaxation. Who can judge of a cat stretched out on a soft cushion? You must see it on the warpath with its back arched and the green fire in its eyes.

Annette was now seeing Sylvie in her own field, the portion of earth she had cleared for herself in the Parisian jungle. The little business woman had taken her trade seriously, and she was second to no one in the art of managing her affairs. Annette could observe her at leisure and close by; for, during the first weeks that followed her moving, she took her meals with Sylvie; it had been agreed that they should keep house together until the settling was entirely finished. Annette, to keep her own end up, tried to make herself useful, sharing in some of the tasks of the workshop. Thus she saw Sylvie at all hours of the day, now with the customers, now with the workers, now alone for a private talk, and she observed in her sister traits she had not known, or which had become accentuated in the last two or three years.

The coaxing Sylvie, under her charming smile, no longer concealed from the penetrating eyes of Annette a rather cold nature which, amid all its entanglements, knew where it was going. She had a small personnel of working-girls whom she managed with superlative skill. With her keen observation and her winning ways, she had

chosen and drawn to herself hearts that had no other attachments. Such, for instance, was her chief assistant, Olympe, who was much older than she, more expert in the craft, an excellent worker, but entirely without ideas, and unable to take care of herself. She had come from the country and was lost in Paris, victimized and laughed at by men, women, her employers and her fellow-workers. She was intelligent enough to see this, but she did not have the strength to resist it, and she had been looking for some one who, without taking advantage of her, would make use of her work and free her from the responsibility of managing herself. It had needed no effort on Sylvie's part to bring her into line. Sylvie was merely obliged to take care that there should be a good understanding among the rival devotions that she had aroused in her personnel, making skilful use of their antagonisms in order to stimulate their zeal and, like a wise government, uniting competitors in the patriotism of the common work. The pride of the little establishment and the desire to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the young mistress delivered them over to her cunning domination, which often made them work till they were exhausted. She set the example, and no one complained. Her affectionate taunts, the droll mockery at which they would burst out laughing, would reinvigorate the weary team and make them hold out to the end. Proud of their employer, they loved her jealously; while she, who stimulated their enthusiasm, remained indifferent to them herself. In the evening, after they had left, she talked about them to her sister in a tone of cold detachment that shocked Annette. For the rest, she was ready to do them a good turn in case of need, and she never left them in the lurch if she found them ill or in difficulties. But whether they were ill or not, if

she did not see them she forgot them. She had no time to think of the absent. She had no time to love very long. A perpetual activity occupied all her moments: the care of her person, housekeeping, meals, business, trying on dresses, gossip, love affairs, amusements. And everything —even to the (never very long) periods of silence, when, between the bustle of the day and her sleep at night, she found herself alone face to face with herself—everything about her was precise. Not a cranny for dreams. When she observed herself, it was with the clear and curious eye that watches others and looks upon oneself as a passer-by. A minimum of inner life: everything projected into acts and words. The need that Annette felt for moral confession found no consideration here. Annette was embarrassed in this perpetual midday. No shadow. Or, if it existed—and it exists in every soul—the door was closed tight upon it. Sylvie was not interested in what might be behind the door. Her only concern was to administer her little domain punctiliously, enjoying everything, her work and her pleasures, but everything at its own time so that nothing should be lost; consequently, she was without passions or any great excesses, for this activity, this perpetual going from one thing to another, not only did not lend itself to anything of the kind, but even destroyed its possibility in advance. No danger that her lovers would make her lose her head.

The truth was that she did not love anything very much. She loved whole-heartedly only one soul, Annette. And how strange this was! Why in the world did she love this big girl who had nothing, or virtually nothing, in common with her?

Ah, that "virtually nothing" was a great deal; who knows but that it was the most important thing of all?—

the tie of blood. This does not always count for much between people of the same family. But when it does count, what a mysterious strength it has! It is a voice that whispers to us, "That other person is a part of me. Moulded in another shape, the substance is the same. I recognize myself in a different form and possessed by an alien soul."

And one wants to capture oneself in this usurper. A double attraction, a triple attraction: the attraction of resemblance, the attraction of opposition, of the war of conquest, which is not the least of the three.

What forces there were binding Annette and Sylvie together! Pride, independence, orderliness, will, the life of the senses! Of these two spirits, the one turned inward, the other outward—the two hemispheres of the soul. They were constituted of almost the same elements, but each, for deep, obscure reasons that sprang from the essence of their personality, repressed one half, wished only to see one half, that which emerged or that which was submerged. The uniting of the two sisters in a common life disturbed the habitual consciousness that each had of herself. Their mutual affection was tinged with hostility. And the warmer the affection was, the keener was the hidden hostility, for they realized how hopelessly unlike they were. Annette was more expert in reading her buried thoughts, and she was also more sincere: she was able to judge them and repress them. The time had passed when she had wished to absorb Sylvie in her imperious love. But Sylvie still had a secret desire to dominate her elder sister, and she was not displeased that circumstances had given her an opportunity to affirm her superiority. It was a sort of revenge for the inequalities of their lot during the girlhood of the two sisters. This unconfessed

feeling, together with her real affection, gave her a sense of satisfaction which she concealed as she saw Annette working under her direction in the shop. She would have liked to have her on her pay roll. She put her in charge of receiving her customers and making charcoal designs for embroidered trimmings; she tried to persuade her that she could look forward to some important position and even to being her partner later on in the business.

Annette, who saw what Sylvie was driving at, had no intention of tying herself down. She let the offer drop, and when Sylvie pressed her she replied that she was not fitted for this work. Upon this Sylvie asked her ironically for what work she was fitted. This was a tender point with her. When one has never had to work for a living and necessity drives one to do so, it is painful not to know what work one is fitted for, not even to know whether, in spite of one's education, one is fitted for any work. But she had to face the question. Annette did not want to remain dependent on Sylvie. Of course Sylvie would never have shown that she felt this dependence: she enjoyed helping her sister. But if she was happy in spending for Annette, she knew what she was spending; her right hand was never unaware of what her left hand gave. Annette was still less unaware of it. She could not endure the thought that Sylvie, as she made up her accounts, mentally wrote her down as her debtor. . . . The devil take all money! Should it be considered between two hearts that love each other? Annette and Sylvie did not consider it in their hearts. But it was a consideration in their life. People do not live by love alone. They live by money too.

XI

This was a truth which Annette had ignored a little too much. She was to lose no time in learning it.

She started out in search of a position, saying nothing about it to Sylvie. Her first idea was to go to see the principal of the school for young girls where she had studied. As an intelligent student who was rich and the daughter of an influential father, she had been a favorite of Mme. Abraham, and she felt certain of her sympathy. This remarkable woman—one of the first to organize the teaching of women in France—had rare qualities of energy and judgment that were complemented—or mitigated, according to the case—by a very cold political sense which many men might have envied. She was disinterested personally, but she was far from being so where her school was concerned. She was a freethinker, and, although she did not parade the fact, she was not without a certain contemptuous anti-clericalism that could do her no harm with her clientele, the daughters of the radical bourgeoisie and young Jewesses. But in place of the dogmas she rejected she had established a civic morality which, although it lacked basis and certitude, was no less strict and commanding. (It was even more so, for the more arbitrary a rule is the more rigid it becomes.) Annette, thanks to her position in society, was intimate with the principal and had her confidence. It amused her to tease the latter about her famous official morality, and Mme. Abraham, who was sceptical by nature, found no difficulty in smiling at the whims of this saucy young thing. She smiled at them, yes, indeed, when they talked together behind her closed door. But as soon as the door was open and Mme. Abraham was

reinstated in her title and her official rank, she was as firm as iron in her belief in the Tables of the laic Law, the product of the highly reasonable morality of a few republican pedagogues. It was enough to say that, if her naked conscience was indifferent to conventional morality, her clothed conscience—her usual conscience—severely blamed Annette's behavior. For she knew about it; the adventure had gone the rounds of society.

But she did not yet know of her ruin. And when Annette called, she took care not to reveal her thoughts: her first business was to find out the reasons for this call and whether the school might reap any advantage from it. She therefore gave her a pleasant though rather reserved greeting. But scarcely had she learned that Annette had come to ask a favor than she remembered the scandal and her smile froze. One can easily accept money from a person of whom one doesn't approve, but one cannot decently give it to such a person. It was easy for Mme. Abraham to find compelling reasons for averting a candidacy that was so impolitic. There was no position in the school; and, when Annette asked for a recommendation to other institutions, Mme. Abraham did not even take the trouble to make vague promises. She was very diplomatic when she was negotiating with anyone who was on top of the wheel of fortune, but she instantly ceased to be so when the wheel had flung them down. A serious mistake in diplomacy! For sometimes those who are down today are on top tomorrow, and good diplomacy looks out for the future. Mme. Abraham considered nothing but the present. At present Annette was drowning; it was a pity, but Mme. Abraham was not in the habit of fishing out those who were in the water. She did not disguise her coldness, and, when Annette failed to abandon her tone

of calm self-possession and henceforth misplaced equality, Mme. Abraham, in order to bring her back to a more exact sense of her distance, declared that she could not conscientiously recommend her. Annette, who was burning with indignation, was on the point of expressing it. A flash of anger passed over her, but it was extinguished in contempt. She was seized by one of those rather diabolical whims of her younger days, an itching desire to mock. She rose, saying, "Well, think of me if you establish a course in the new morality."

Mme. Abraham looked at her, taken aback; the impertinence was all too evident. She replied dryly, "The old one is good enough for us."

"But it might not be a bad thing to enlarge it a little."

"What would you like to add to it?"

"Nothing very much," said Annette, calmly. "Freedom and humanity."

Mme. Abraham, hurt, said: "The right to love, no doubt?"

"No," said Annette, "the right to have a child."

As she went out she shrugged her shoulders at her useless bravado. . . . Stupid! . . . What was the use of making an enemy? . . . She laughed just the same as she thought of the vexed expression of her antagonist. A woman cannot resist the pleasure of slighting another. Bah! The Abraham woman would remain her enemy only until Annette had reconquered her position. And she would reconquer it!

Annette visited other institutions, but there were no positions. There were none for women. The Latin democracies are only made for men; they sometimes put feminism on their programmes, but they distrust it; they are in no hurry to furnish arms to what still remains, at

the dawn of the twentieth century, the enslaved rival, a rival that will not long so remain, thanks to the tenacity of the Nordic woman. Pressure will have to be brought by the public opinion of the rest of the world to oblige them to offer a crabbed welcome to the woman who works and wishes to exercise her rights.

Annette might have been admitted, however, to two or three positions if her susceptibility had not caused her to lose them. They would have been ready to shut their eyes to her irregular situation if she herself had been willing to give them some specious explanation—that she was a widow or divorced by her own choice. But when she was questioned her absurd pride drove her to tell the facts as they were. After two or three rebuffs, she approached no more institutions, not even the University, although in the latter she had left sympathetic friends behind her and would have found minds large enough to help her without censuring her. But she was afraid of being wounded. She was still inexperienced in the country of the poor. The hands of her pride had not had time to become callous.

She looked about for a chance to give private lessons. She did not wish to seek them among the friends of her own class; she preferred to conceal her steps. She turned to those clandestine employment—those exploitative—agencies that still exist in Paris. She was not skilful enough to appear well from their point of view. She had too much disdain. They resented her fastidiousness. Instead of accepting whatever offered, like so many unhappy souls who are fortified with very few recommendations, who will teach anything that is asked of them at famine prices and work from dawn till dark, she presumed to pick and choose.

At last, through the mediation of Sylvie's customers, she found a few foreigners. She gave lessons in conversation to some Americans who treated her kindly and occasionally invited her to drive in their carriages, though they offered her an absurd remuneration, never even thinking that they ought to have paid her more. They did not hesitate to give a hundred francs for a pair of shoes, while for an hour of French they would pay a franc. (It was not impossible in those days to find people who would give lessons for fifty centimes!) Annette, who did not have the right to be exacting as yet, refused to accept this shameful treatment. But after having sought far and wide, she could find nothing better. The well-to-do bourgeoisie who, under the eye of public opinion, are willing to spend whatever is demanded for the education of their children when the teaching is public, sordidly exploit instructors in their own households. There no one sees you. You are dealing with people who are too humble to resist: for one who refuses there are ten who beg you to accept them!

Isolated, without experience, Annette was in a poor position to protect herself. But she had the practical instinct of the Rivières and she had her pride, and they would not accept the humiliating wages to which others yielded. She was not of the whining sort who complain and give in. She did not complain and she did not give in. And in the face of all expectation this attitude was successful. The human species is cowardly; Annette had a calm, rather haughty way of saying no that cut short all bargaining; people did not dare to treat her as they would have treated others, and she obtained conditions that were rather more favorable. Not greatly so. She had to go through many weary hours to earn what she

spent every day. Her pupils were scattered in remote quarters, and this was before the time of the autobusses and the metro in Paris. When she came home in the evening, her feet ached and her shoes were worn out. But she was robust, and it gave her a sense of satisfaction to experience the life of toil for one's daily bread. To earn her bread was a new adventure for Annette. When she was successful in one of those little duels of the will with her exploiters, she was as well pleased with her day as a gambler who, in the pleasure of what he has won, forgets the insignificance of the stake. She learned to see men better. It was not always a pleasant sight. But everything is worth learning. She came into contact with the obscure world of toil. But her contacts were inadequate and without depth. If wealth isolates, poverty isolates no less. Every one is caught fast in his difficulties and his effort, and he sees in others not so much brothers in misery as rivals whose fortune is made at the expense of his own.

Annette divined this feeling in the women with whom she found herself thrown, and she understood it; for she was a privileged being among them. If she worked in order not to be a charge upon her sister, her sister was none the less there; she was safe from the danger of destitution. She did not know that feverish uncertainty about tomorrow. She had her child to enjoy; no one was trying to take him away from her. How compare her lot with that of this woman whose story she had learned —a teacher who had been dismissed because she, like Annette, had had the hardihood to be a mother. It was true that she had been tolerated at first on condition that she kept her maternity secret. Exiled in a post of disgrace, in the depths of the country, she had had to separate from the child of her own flesh. But she could not

keep herself from running to him when he was ill. The secret was out, and the virtuous countryside made ferocious sport of her. The authorities of the university of course upheld the popular decree and threw into the street the two rebels against the code. And it was with them that Annette was disputing their meagre livelihood. She took care not to apply for the position which the other woman was seeking. But she was chosen. Just because she sought positions less eagerly, because she had less need of them. People have little respect for those who are hungry. And then the poor souls whom she supplanted treated her as an intruder who was robbing them. They knew they were unjust; but it is comforting to be unjust when you are a victim of injustice. Annette became familiar with that greatest of all wars—the war of the workers, not against nature or circumstances, nor against the rich for taking their bread away from them—the war of the workers against the workers who are snatching the bread from each other, the crumbs that have fallen from the table of the rich or from that sordid Crœsus, the State. That is the misery of miseries, most felt by women, and especially those of today. For they are still incapable of organization. They remain in the state of primitive warfare, the individual against the individual; instead of pooling their difficulties, they multiply them.

Annette hardened herself, and although her heart bled her eyes were aflame with joy. She strode on, sustained in her ungrateful work by its novelty, the energy she had to spend—and the thought of her child, which illumined the whole day.

XII

Marc spent the day in Sylvie's workshop. Aunt Victorine had flickered out shortly after they were settled. She had not been able to survive the ruin of the old home, the loss of the old furniture, the habits of a peaceful half-century. Since Annette was out of the house till evening, Sylvie took charge of the child. He was the darling of the workshop, petted by the customers and the workers, rummaging about on all fours, sitting under a table, collecting hooks and eyes and scraps of chiffon, winding skeins of silk, rolling balls, stuffing himself with sweets and smothered with kisses. He was a little boy of three or four, with golden auburn hair like Annette's, and he had been rather pale ever since his illness. Life for him was a perpetual spectacle. Sylvie could remember her own first experiences when, sitting under her mother's counter, she had listened to the customers. But the great personages, from the tops of their stilts, have too utterly different a field of vision to know what catches the eyes of a child. And its rosy ears. . . . There was quite enough to keep them busy in the workshop! Every tongue was loosened, laughing, bold, brazen. Prudery was no weakness of Sylvie and her flock. Plenty of laughing, plenty of gossip, makes the needle fly. No one thought of the child. Was it possible that he understood? He did not understand (in all probability), but he grasped things, he let nothing escape him. The child collected everything, touched everything, tasted everything. Woe to whatever lay in his way! Sprawling under a chair, he put in his mouth whatever fell from above, scraps of biscuit, buttons, fruit-stones; and he also put

words there. Without knowing what they meant. Exactly, in order to find out! And he munched away and sang.

"Little pig!"

An apprentice would snatch from his fingers a ribbon he was sucking, or perhaps experimentally burying in his nose. But no one took from him the words he had swallowed. He was doing nothing with them for the present; there was nothing he could do with them. But they were not lost.

Routed out from under the furniture and the petticoats, where he was absorbed in curious studies of the fidgeting feet and the imprisoned toes curled up in their shoes, dragged back to the conventions, to his normal position in the world of grown-ups, he would remain motionless, soberly seated on a low stool between Sylvie's legs. Or, since his aunt rarely kept still, between some other pair of knees. He would lean his cheek against the warm cloth and watch, with his nose in the air and his head thrown back, those bending faces with their puckered eyes, their quick, shining, moving pupils, those mouths, biting the thread; he saw the saliva and the lower lips—they seemed to be the upper ones—gnawed by the teeth, the undersides of the nostrils, covered with little red streaks and trembling as the words came, and the fingers that flew with their needles. Suddenly a hand would tickle his chin: there was a thimble at the end of it that gave him a cold feeling in his neck. Here, as ever, nothing was lost on him; these warm and cold contacts, this downy glow, these lights that reddened and these shadows that turned to amber the bits of living flesh, yes, and this feminine odor. . . . He was certainly not aware of it himself, but that multiple consciousness, that many-faceted conscious-

ness which is spread about the whole periphery of a child, registered everything that passed over its little printer's-roller. . . . These women never suspected that their images, complete from head to foot, were being imprinted on this little sensitive plate. But he saw them only fragmentarily: pieces were missing, as in a puzzle in which the parts are mixed up. From this resulted his strange, fleeting preferences, as lively as they were varied, which seemed capricious but were really due to his deep-seated predisposition. A clever person might have said what it was in each of these women that attracted him. He was like a regular household pet: it was the gentleness of the hands rather than the whole person that he liked. And it was the totality of these sweetnesses, the home, the workshop. He was frankly an egoist. (And rightfully: the little builder has to assemble his ego first of all.) A sincere egoist, even in his blandishments. For he was blandishing: he wanted to please and he enjoyed giving pleasure, but only to those whom he had chosen.

From the very beginning his great favorite had been Sylvie. The instinct of the domestic animal in him had at once perceived that she was the god of the household, the master who dispensed food and kisses and was responsible for the tone of the day, and whom it was a good thing to propitiate. But it was better still to be propitiated by her. And the child had observed that this privilege had been accorded to him. It never occurred to him that it might not be deserved. Thus he received without surprise but with satisfaction the agreeable and flattering homage that was rendered to him by the sovereign of the workshop. Sylvie spoiled him, adored him, went into ecstasies over his gestures, his steps, his words, his intelligence, his beauty, his mouth, his eyes, his nose;

she held him up to the admiration of her customers and preened herself on his account as if he had been her own chick.

To tell the truth, she also called him, "Little blackguard! Silly little fool!" And sometimes she tweaked his nose, slapped him, gave him a spanking. But from her he did not take this as an offence; although he protested loudly, he did not even find it too disagreeable. May not any one be struck by the hand of the queen? From any one else, from one of the girls in the workroom, heavens above, he would never have permitted it! Even without her sceptre, Sylvie had a charm for him. In his feminine puzzle, made up of this group and that, she had provided him with the greatest number of parts; he loved to press against her dress, with his head against her stomach, to listen to her voice (he could hear her laughing all through her body), or clamber up her hips till he had reached the summit; and then, with his two arms knotted about her neck, he would rub his nose, his lips and his eyes against her soft cheek, close to her ears, among the little blonde curls that had such a nice smell. What the eye is for the mind of grown-ups, the sense of touch is for that of children. It is the talisman that permits one to see over the wall and weave within oneself the dream of things one believes one sees, the illusion of life. The child spun his web. And without knowing what these blonde curls were, or what this cheek was, this voice, this laugh, this Sylvie or this "I," he thought, "This is mine."

XIII

Annette would come home in the evening. She would be famished. All day she had walked in a waterless desert, a world without love. All day she had walked with her eyes turned towards the spring which, in the evening, she would find again. She heard it rippling; in anticipation she would dip her lips in it; a passer-by in the street might have taken as intended for him the smile which this beautiful woman who was hastening along addressed to the image of her child. As she approached Sylvie's house, her steps quickened like those of a horse that scents the oats; and when at last she entered, laughing with greedy love, no matter how tired she was she went upstairs at a run. The door opened; she dashed in and threw herself on the child; she caught him up in her hands, squeezed him, devoured him furiously, his eye, his nose, under his nose, wherever she happened to alight, whatever part she could reach, and her mad joy expressed itself noisily. As for him, as he played about or amused himself soberly, comfortably settled on the padded sofa, drawing lines with a piece of chalk or mixing up threads of various colors, he was none too pleased by this invasion. This great rough woman who came in without any warning, seized him, pulled him about, shouted in his ear, stifled him with kisses . . . he didn't like it at all! To be disposed of without his permission made him indignant. He wouldn't allow it. He was cross and he struggled; but this only made her shake him, fondle him, laugh and cry all the more furiously. . . . Everything about her displeased him: this lack of consideration, this noise, this violence. . . . He quite understood that she ought to love

him, admire him and even kiss him. But she should have had better manners! Where had she come from? Sylvie and her girls were more ladylike. When they played with him, even when they laughed or exclaimed, they didn't make such a racket and seize you and hug you in this brutal way. He was astonished that Sylvie, who knew so well how to give her subjects a dressing down, should never give this ill-bred person a lesson in deportment, that she did not protect him from such familiarities. On the contrary, Sylvia assumed with Annette a tone of affectionate equality which she did not have for any one else, and she said to Marc, "Come, be good! Kiss your mother!"

His mother! Of course, he knew it. But that was no excuse. Yes, she too was a domestic power. He was still too close to the warmth of the breast not to have kept on his epicurean mouth the sugary taste of milk, not to have kept in his birdlike body the golden shadow of the wing that sheltered him. Even more recent were the nights of illness when the invisible enemy had seized the throat of the fledgling and the head of the great protectress had bent over him. Of course, of course! But now he no longer needed this. If he preserved these memories and a hundred others that were stored away in his granary, he had no use for them at present. Later, perhaps, he would see. . . . Every moment now brought him a new gift; he had enough to do to gather them all in. A child is ungrateful by nature. *Mens momentanea.* Do you imagine he has time to remember what was good yesterday? What is good for him is what is good today. Today Annette had made the great mistake of allowing herself to be eclipsed by others who were more agreeable and even more serviceable in Marc's eyes. Instead of

going off, heaven knew where, and making her unseemly appearances in the evening, why didn't she stay here like Sylvia and the others, busy all day with Marc and paying court to him? It was her loss. So he barely condescended to accept Annette's effusions, responding to the rain of silly, loving questions with a bored and distant Yes, No, Good Morning, Good Evening; and then, flying from the downpour and wiping his cheek, he would return to his play or to Sylvie's knees.

Annette could not help seeing that Marc preferred Sylvie to herself. Sylvie saw it even more clearly. They laughed about it together, and both pretended not to attach a shadow of importance to it. But deep in their hearts Sylvie was flattered and Annette was jealous. They took good care not to confess this to each other. Like a good girl, Sylvie forced the ungracious child to kiss Annette. Annette found little joy in these forced embraces; Sylvie found more. She did not tell herself that she was stealing from the garden of the poor, and that later she would royally return some of the fruit. But what one keeps to oneself in order not to load oneself with troublesome scruples, one only tastes the better with one's closed mouth. And although she had no unkind feeling, Sylvie found more pleasure in making the child fondle her and in displaying her power over him in Annette's presence. Annette, pretending to joke, would say, in a careless tone, "Out of sight, out of mind." But her heart did not take it as a joke. There was no joke about it. Annette had no humor save that of the intellect. Her love was as foolish as that of a dumb creature. It was painful to be a woman among women and to be obliged to hide one's feelings. People would only laugh at you if you showed your poor famished heart. Annette, when she was with other

people, acted as if her love were an old story; she talked about her day, the people she had seen, what she had learned, said and done—in short, everything that was indifferent to her. (Oh, how indifferent!)

But at night, by herself, in her apartment, alone with her child, she could give free rein to the torment she felt. To her joy, too, her torrential passion. No need to take precautions any longer. There was no one from whom to hide herself. She had her son entirely at her mercy. She abused her power a little; she wearied him with her wild affection. Since here, away from Sylvie, he no longer had the upper hand, the little politician did not show his annoyance: till morning came he would have to humor this extravagant mother. He used strategy; he pretended to fall asleep. He did not have to pretend very much; sleep came quickly after his full days. All the same, it had not quite come when, like a lamb in his mother's arms, with his eyes closed, Marc would seem to be overwhelmed by it. Annette, interrupting her prattle, was obliged to carry him to bed; and the little comedian, in the half-sleep down which he let himself slip, step by step, down which he slid on the banisters to the foot, laughed in his sleeve as he watched through his eyelashes the credulous Mamma who was mutely adoring him. He had a sense of his superiority, he was grateful to her for it; and sometimes in a transport he would even throw his little arms about her neck as she knelt beside him. By a surprise like that Annette was repaid for her troubles. But the stingy child did not repeat it often, and Annette had to fall asleep hungry. It was not before she had turned over in bed many times to listen to the child's breathing as her thoughts revolved feverishly. He had not kissed her nicely, and she said to herself, "He doesn't love me."

Her heart would shrink. But she would at once correct herself. "What nonsense I'm inventing!" The idea had to be repressed at once. How could one live with it? No, it wasn't true. . . . The good little creature she was accusing! She hastily sought among her memories for the best she had, for the pretty tricks of the child, for his lovable ways. At the images she called up she would have liked to snatch him out of his bed and kiss him. . . . But hush! She mustn't wake him up. That delicious little breath. . . . My treasure! . . . How good it will all be later!

For as the present was decidedly meagre, Annette made up for it by inventing a future of motherly intimacy with her son that conformed with her desires. She needed an idol to absorb the energies of her nature. For some time now they had been troubling her again.

XIV

It was no longer a restless melancholy, that neurasthenic depression which had preceded her child's illness and which the illness had dissipated—those days of a life that was at a standstill, in which she felt emptied of energy and interest: the becalmed sea before the flow of the tide.

This was the return of the oceanic flood. It announced itself by a roaring of the waves, a nocturnal resurgence. For a time maternity had satisfied the passionate elements of her nature. The material fatigue of a working life had set up a dam against them. But, gathering in the shadow, they beat against the rock. The soul, which as it grows climbs up the spiral of life, found itself return-

ing to a state bordering on that from which it had passed, four or five years before, between the burning summer of the hotel in the Grisons and the spring of love with Roger Brissot. Bordering on it, but not the same. One returns on the spiral above the past; one does not descend to it again. Annette's nature had ripened. There was no longer in her agitation any of the blind ingenuousness of the young girl. She was a woman; her desires were keen and definite. She knew whither they led. And if she did not wish to know, it was precisely because she did know. Her will had matured no less than her flesh. Everything about her had become richer, and everything had assumed an accent of passion.

The reappearance of these familiar demons, these dreaded demons, was like a midday when a storm is gathering. A heavy silence, a silence big with the tempest to come. It followed the careless joys and the careless sorrows of the young morning. The shadows slipped unceasingly over Annette's face. She had become tense. When she was in company or off her guard, when she was not distracted by the child's presence, she would fall into a dumb silence, with a line between her brows. When she became aware of this, she would slip noiselessly away. Any one who had been disturbed about her would have found her in her room, setting it in order, making her bed, turning the mattress, polishing the furniture or the floor, using more movements than were necessary, but not succeeding in stifling the spirit that resounded within her. She would stop in the midst of something she was doing, upright on a chair, a bit of chiffon in her hand, or leaning on the window-sill. Then she would forget everything, not only the past but the present as well, the dead and the living, even her child. She saw without seeing,

she heard without hearing, she thought without thinking. A flame that burned in empty space. A sail in the wind of the open sea. She felt the great breath that passed through her limbs, and the ship vibrated with all its masts. And then from the boundless void emerged the face of the things that surrounded her. From the court of the house over which Annette was leaning mounted the familiar sounds; she recognized the voice of the child talking and singing. But her reverie was not interrupted; it took another course. It was the song of a bird on a summer afternoon. O sunny heart, what an amount of life you still have to give! Take the world into your open arms! Too much plunder! . . . Her consciousness relaxed its grip; she fell back into the incandescent gulf where there was no longer any song, any child's voice, any Annette . . . nothing but a powerful vibration of sunlight. . . .

Annette awakened, leaning on her elbow on the window-sill.

But at night the tormenting dreams that had disappeared since Marc's birth took up their abode in her. They came in groups of three or four, ceaselessly succeeding one another. Annette rolled from one to another, layer after layer of them. She would get up in the morning fatigued, feverish; she had lived ten nights in one. And she did not want to recall what she had dreamed.

Those who saw Annette frequently had observed her anxious brow and her absorbed eyes; they did not understand this sudden change, but they were not disturbed by it; they attributed it to external causes, material difficulties. For Annette these periods of anxiety were a season of deep renewal. She could not do justice to them, for they brought with them the weight of gestation,

which was more agonizing than that of maternity. It was a maternity indeed, that of the buried soul. The human being is wrapped up like a seed in the depths of matter, in the amalgam of humus and human loam where the generations have left their debris. The labor of a great life consists in disengaging it. For this childbirth a whole lifetime is necessary, and often the midwife is death.

Annette had the secret anguish of the unknown being who was to emerge from her some day and rend her. Overcome by fits of shame, she would shut herself up in a tumultuous retreat, face to face with the immanent Being; and their relations were hostile. The air was charged with electricity; its gusts rose and fell in the immobility. She realized her danger. In vain had her consciousness left in the shadow the thing that disturbed her. "In the shadow" meant in herself, in her own home. And to feel her home peopled from top to bottom with beings whom she did not know was far from reassuring.

"All that. . . . I am all that. . . . But what does it want of me? . . . What do I myself desire?"

In reply, she said to herself, "You have nothing more to desire. You possess."

Her stiffened will turned all the violence of her love upon the child. These continual recurrences of maternal passion were not very fortunate. Abnormal, excessive, unhealthy—(for this passion sprang from an impossible attempt to turn into a path that was not theirs alien and insistent instincts)—they could only end in disappointment. She repelled the child. Marc would not submit to being monopolized in this way. He no longer concealed his ill-will from his mother. He thought her a bore and he told her so in cross little monologues which happily

Annette did not hear, but which Sylvie overheard one day. She scolded him for it, bursting out laughing at the same time. Marc, in a corner by the door, was talking to the wall, saying, as he made little impatient gestures, "That woman makes me tired!"

XV

People are always writing the history of the events of a life. They imagine they see the life itself in them, but in reality these events are only its outer covering. The life itself is within. The events act upon it only in so far as it has chosen them; one might be tempted to say it has produced them, and in many cases this is the exact truth. Twenty events take place each month under our eyes; they do not count for us because we have nothing to do with them. But when one of them touches us, it is a safe wager that we have gone halfway to meet it; and if the shock loosens a spring in us, it is because the spring is wound up and awaiting the shock.

Towards the end of 1904, Annette's moral tension gave way, and the transformations it brought about in her seemed to coincide with certain changes which, at the same moment, took place in her.

Sylvie married. She was twenty-six years old; she had had enough of the joys of liberty; she decided that the moment had come to enjoy those of a home. She took her time making her choice. The stuff of which a lover is made does not need to be lasting; it only needs to be pleasing. But a good husband must be made of sound, durable material. Of course it was important for Sylvia that he should be attractive too. But there are ways and

ways of being attractive. In choosing a husband one doesn't have to lose one's head. Sylvie consulted her common sense and even her social sense. Her business was going well. Her establishment, *Sylvie: Robes et manteaux*, had acquired, along with a select clientele of the fairly well-to-do bourgeoisie, a justified reputation for elegance and style at moderate prices. She had reached a point in her business where she could go no further alone. To advance she would be obliged to associate other forces with her own and add to her seamstress's workshop a tailor's shop that would enable her to enlarge the circle of her operations.

Without taking any one into her confidence she looked about for some one who would fall in with her plans. She made her choice soberly; and once it was made she decided to marry. Love would come later. It should have its proper place: Sylvie would not marry a man whom she could not love. But love must await its turn. Business came first.

The name of the object of her choice was Selve (Leopold); and no sooner had she cast her eye upon him than the little business woman decided on the name, the beacon-light of the new establishment, *Selve et Sylvie.* But although, for a woman, a name is never unimportant, Sylvie was not so foolish as to be satisfied with a name alone; and Selve (Leopold) was a good match. No longer very young, looking all of his thirty-five years, a rather handsome man in the popular style, rather ugly, in fact, but solidly built, with reddish blond hair and a florid complexion, he was the head cutter at a great tailoring establishment, skilful in his craft, earning a good income, steady, anything but dissipated. Sylvie had taken his measure; the question was settled—in Sylvie's mind.

She had not consulted Selve about it. But the assent of the man she had chosen was the last thing to trouble her. She took it upon herself to win this.

Selve himself would never have sought anything of the kind. He was devoted to his own welfare and his own habits, a good soul, not at all ambitious and rather egoistical, and he had made up his mind to remain unmarried. It would not have occurred to him to quit his lucrative position as second fiddle, which entailed no responsibility, with an employer who knew his value. Sylvie upset his plans and his peace of mind in the twinkling of an eye. She met him—she took pains to meet him—at an exhibition whither she had gone, as he had, to study the modes they were both going to contribute to launch. She was surrounded by admirers, and without paying any attention to Selve she began to distribute her smiles and clever repartees to three or four young men who were very much taken with her. Suddenly, Selve, observing with some annoyance this grace and wit that were not for him, perceived that he had become the object of her attentions. She was speaking now only for him; the others had ceased to count. He was all the more affected by this instantaneous change because he attributed it to his own personal merit. With this stroke he was caught. Farewell to his resolutions!

A little while after this, Sylvie begged Annette to join her in the evening after dinner at a time when there would be no one in the workroom.

"I've asked you to come," she said, "because I'm expecting some one."

Annette was surprised. "What! You need me? Can't you receive him alone?" Sylvie said soberly, "I think it would look better."

"This attack of propriety has come rather late."

"Better late than never," said Sylvie, diplomatically.

"Nonsense! Try that on somebody else."

"Just what I'm doing," said Sylvie.

Annette shook her finger at her. "You have some one up your sleeve. Well, who is this someone?"

"Here he is now."

Selve (Leopold) was ringing the bell. He seemed to be annoyed at not finding Sylvie alone, but as a well-bred man he put a good face on the situation. It was not easy for him to appear to advantage alone in the presence of two young gossips who were alarming enough anyway and were evidently in each other's confidence. He felt that these two pairs of eyes were watching him. After a few rather heavy gallantries, of which, as a matter of politeness, Annette had her share, he began to talk about business, the trade, the strenuous life he led. Annette, with an air of being interested, charitably asked him a few questions. He became more confident and told about the difficulties of his career, his disappointments, his success, missing no opportunity to place himself in a good light. He seemed simple, cordial, self-sufficient; he played with all his cards on the table. Sylvie, who was more cautious, watched his play before playing herself. Annette, who was soon relegated to the background, where she followed the game, was less surprised at the competence of her sister than at the humbleness of her choice. It would have been easy for Sylvie to make a more brilliant match; she had simply not wished to do so. She distrusted men who were too handsome and too clever. It goes without saying that she would not have chosen a goose or a fool. *In medio*. . . . What she wanted was a prudent second in command, not someone who would command her. She

knew that in marriage everybody has to give something and wants to get something: it is a question of supply and demand. For herself she demanded the right to remain the mistress in her own household. And what did he demand? Ah, poor fellow, to be loved for himself, just for himself. He was not conceited; he knew well enough that he was neither handsome nor attractive. But it was his weakness to wish to be married for love. Ridiculous, wasn't it? He shrugged his shoulders at the idea, for he was no fool, this big, ingenuous creature who was familiar enough with life and sceptical, as three out of every four Frenchmen are, where women were concerned. But the need of the heart is so strong! That stupid need! "Why shouldn't I be loved? I'm as good as others who are." So, by turns, he was almost humble and almost fatuous. And always begging. This was not very clever of him, and it was even worse that he allowed it to be seen. For she had seen him very clearly, the sharp-eyed minx. And to those big, blue, round, rather prominent eyes that were always asking, "Do you love me?"—her soft eyes responded neither with a Yes nor with a No. For uncertainty is like fuel to love.

When the sisters found themselves alone again, Annette said to Sylvie, "Don't play with him too much!"

"Why not?" said Sylvie, wondering. "The stakes are worth the trouble."

"Then it's serious?"

"Very serious."

"I can't imagine you married."

"Really? I dare say you will see me so two or three times."

"I don't like you to laugh at these things."

"What would one laugh at, my dear Salvation Army

lassie? Come, Mrs. General Booth"—she pronounced it "Botte"—"don't knit your beautiful brows. I'm not thinking of changing before I've even tried it. I am marrying in the hope that it's for good. But if it doesn't last, one must be able to resign oneself."

"I am not anxious about you," said Annette.

"Really? I thank you for his sake. Has he made a conquest of you?"

"He isn't good enough for you, Sylvie. But I shouldn't want you to make this good man suffer some day."

Sylvie smiled and looked at her teeth in the mirror.

"Suffer! Everybody makes the other person suffer. That's nothing. Of course he will suffer, poor man! I shouldn't mind being in his place. Come, don't disturb yourself about him. Do you think I don't know the value of my Adonis? It isn't dazzling, but it amounts to a good deal. I know what I'm about. I shan't tell him, for it doesn't do to spoil men. It allows them to think they have rights over us. But privately I shall not forget it. I shan't do myself the wrong of doing him a wrong. And if I don't promise never to make him angry—which might be an excellent way of making him a little thinner—I shan't put him on the grill unless it is necessary. Of course, assuming that I have no reason to complain of him. Otherwise it would serve him right to give him his due. And I pay in cash. I am an honest business woman; I don't deceive my customers any more than is necessary for me to live. Unless they try to get the best of me. Then I get the best of them. Don't I!"

"To think," Annette exclaimed, "that you never can get her to talk seriously!"

"Life would not be endurable," said Sylvie, "if one had to say serious things seriously!"

Leopold was not long in coming back again, and Sylvie did not leave him languishing. She had quickly made the tour of the enemy's positions, reconnoitered behind his defensive works and discovered his arms, his baggage and his supplies before giving herself in good earnest. She had no difficulty in leading him to adopt her own plans. Till his last day Leopold was to preserve the illusion that it was he who had conceived the idea of establishing the great dressmaking establishment of *Selve et Sylvie*.

The marriage was arranged for the middle of January, a time when work would be rather slack. The preceding weeks were a joyous time in the workroom. The radiant Leopold regaled the whole band, took them to the theatre and the movies. They all had such a need for laughter! When one of them was married, it was as if she brought marriage into the house. And each of the others greeted the visitor with a whispered "Don't forget! The next time it will be my turn. . . ."

Annette was caught up in the general joy. Instead of feeling the deprivation of her own life, she asked herself what had become of her troubles. They slipped away as a chemise slips down one's thighs. O youthful body, sorrow cannot cling to you! Not that this marriage gave her any satisfaction. She had loved her sister too tenderly not to feel rather sad to see her going still further away from her. And it was not pleasant to see such a pretty girl giving herself to this rather vulgar man. Annette had had other dreams for Sylvie. But with our dreams other people have nothing to do. Their way of being happy is their own, not ours. And they are right.

Sylvie was satisfied. Leopold's affection, the admiration which he showed for her, touched her vanity and gradually her heart. As she had said to her sister, she appre-

ciated the serious character of the man she had chosen. He would be a steadfast companion who would not interfere with her. She had no intention of abusing him—though one never knew!—but she was certain that she would never have to give him any minute account of her behavior. Leopold made no attempt to learn about Sylvie's past; he trusted her, and this pleased her. His experience of life had left Leopold with few illusions; above all, it had left him not unwilling to compromise; it inclined him to assume for his own use and accept for that of others, as a rule of conduct, the cordial egoism of an honest, sceptical, affectionate man who was not exacting and did not ask of others more than he himself could give.

Sylvie, indeed, found herself much closer to him than to Annette. She loved Annette more; but, as she said to herself, laughing, she would never have married a masculine Annette. No, that would have turned out badly.

Selve inspired her with a feeling of complete security. This restful impression dispensed her from thinking about him: she thought of the wedding, of the dress she was making, of her future household, and she made great plans for the business. It was perfectly satisfying.

XVI

The wedding took place one radiant winter day. Selve carried off all his friends to the woods of Vincennes. They separated into jolly groups. Annette gaily mingled with them. In former times she would have been sensitive to the noisy and rather vulgar side of these rejoicings, but she was not so now. She laughed with these bold young men, these hearty girls who were giving them-

selves a day of merriment between their days of toil. She took part in their sports, and she enchanted everybody with her enthusiasm. Sylvie, who had known her as cold and contemptuous, watched her running and amusing herself in this frank way. There she was playing blind-man's buff, with her eyes under the bandage, red with excitement, her mouth open and laughing, her chin in the air, as if to seize the light as it flew past, her arms stretched out before her and her hands like wings, striding along with great steps, stumbling, laughing her prettiest. . . . What was the beautiful, vigorous body of this passionate blind girl going to seize? Who was going to seize her? More than one person who was watching her might have had this thought. But Annette seemed to be thinking only of her game. What had become of the cares that had weighed upon her yesterday? Of her anxious, tense, absorbed air? . . . What elasticity she had! . . . Sylvie congratulated herself on having succeeded in distracting Annette from her troubles, and she was overjoyed at this. But Annette knew very well that the cause lay much further back. She was not disburdened of her cares because she was laughing at the wedding. She was laughing at the wedding because she was disburdened.

What had happened? It was a strange thing and one that was not the work of a day, although on this day it appeared so.

One Sunday morning, a few weeks before this, she had been sitting half-clad before her dressing-table. She took a long time over her toilet on Sunday, for on other days she was obliged to go out so early. She was weary with the accumulated fatigue of the week. The child, who had just got up, had slipped out of the room to find his aunt. He was very much interested in the wedding, and he

amused Sylvie by the reflexions which, as a man of experience, he expressed on this subject. Leopold petted him; as a way of courting Sylvie, he courted her little lap-dog. And Marc, flattered and proud of his importance, passed all his time in the apartment below, remaining with his mother very reluctantly. Annette was bitterly disheartened by this. But this morning her weariness swept away her sadness and even mingled with it a secret feeling that lightened it. She sighed, however, from habit. She was feeling that mingled fatigue and enjoyment which came from knowing that she could, thank heaven, stretch out at full length on this Sunday without having to stir. . . . Sunday! In former days Annette had never dreamed how precious it was.

"How weary I am, how weary I am! How good it is not to budge! If I were sitting in the most uncomfortable position, leaning on my elbow in some tiresome way, I shouldn't move. I could sleep for a thousand years. There is a charm in this that holds you. One's afraid of breaking it. Let's not stir. How good it is!"

She saw through the window, on the roof opposite, a stream of smoke coming from the baker's chimney. It was carried off by the wind, in spirals, bright and gay, stretching out, rolling, running and dancing against the blue sky. Annette's eyes laughed and her spirit danced in the meadows of the air—borne along in the wake of the mad arabesques. All the weight of the earth had slipped away from her. Her spirit felt naked in the wind and the sun. Annette sang in a low voice. . . . And suddenly there appeared before her the enraptured eyes of a young man who had looked at her the day before in an omnibus. She did not know him, and in all probability she would never see him again. But this look, which she had surprised as

she suddenly turned her head—he did not think he was being seen—confessed so naïvely how charmed he was that ever since a fresh joy had remained in her heart. She pretended to herself that she did not know the cause of this; but as her mirror returned to her the image of her smile, she saw herself with the eyes of the one who would love her some day. . . . What has become of you, my worries? I can still hear them murmuring fitfully, far, far away.

"Enough, enough! No more of this. One must be reasonable."

There was nothing new in what Annette said to herself. Twenty times she had said it. But although she did as she said, she expected nothing from it. Success does not always depend on being reasonable. Reason is a good counsellor, but counsellors do not guarantee payment. And the heart is only convinced by the reasons of the heart.

She had no lack of these now. Annette was willing to see how absurd were the demands made by her maternal love. But if she was ready to do this, it was because other stifled aspirations had risen to the surface. She could no longer deny them; she no longer wished to do so. And once she had given them this tacit acquiescence, Annette felt liberated. The voice of her reawakened youth said to her, "Nothing is lost. You still have the right to be happy. Your life is just beginning."

The world revived. Everything had a savor again. Even on dull days she had her luminous moments of escape. Annette formed no plans for the future. She abandoned herself to the happiness, whatever it might be, of a future that she had recaptured. Yes, yes, she was young, young as the young year. . . . A whole life before her. . . . There would never be enough of it.

XVII

One of those gay, precocious months of February that have so much charm in Paris. Spring is not yet in the sky or in the heart, but everything is pure, pure light, the limpid joy of a child that has awakened. The beautiful dawn of the year is beginning, and before the birds have reappeared one hears them coming. As from the summit of a tower lost in the clear sky, one sees them, clouds of wings, swarms of swallows. They are coming, they are crossing the seas. And already some of them are singing in my heart.

Like every healthy being, Annette loved all the seasons. In adapting herself to them, she shared in their secret energies. Those of the springtime exalted her.

She went along, happy to be walking, happy to be working, carrying home with her a wholesome fatigue and a hearty appetite. She was interested in everything, filled with a new curiosity about the things of the mind which for four years she had abandoned, about books, music; and sometimes in the evening, although she was half dead, she would go out and run to the other end of Paris to use a ticket to some concert. Sylvie envied her; she herself was in the early stages of pregnancy, and it was far from pleasant.

In her evening walks, Annette was followed more than once. She did not notice this: absent-minded, dreaming, amused, she would suddenly stop in the midst of her soliloquy with the feeling that she was dragging something along at her heels. She would wake up and look curiously at the thing that was whispering to her, shrug

her shoulders or make a face and start off briskly saying, "What an old idiot!"

The idiot was often young, and Annette thought, "In a dozen years Marc may be like this."

She stopped indignantly. The false Marc received the wrath of the eyes which she turned upon the other, and he did not persist. The eyes began to laugh. The idea of seeing Marc in such a situation, a big handsome boy, amused her in spite of everything. But her maternal pride was hurt. She scolded herself for the observation she had made. Or rather she scolded Marc.

"Young scamp!" she muttered. "When I get home I'll pull his ears." (She did pull them.)

These little adventures entertained her. At first, that is. But when they kept on. . . .

"Oh, what a pest! This is tiresome. Am I never to be allowed to walk in peace any more? Because you look to the right, to the left, in the simplest, most harmless way, because you laugh as you walk along, people have to suspect you are thinking of love! I know love, I have seen enough of it. The fools who imagine one can't get along without them! It never occurs to them that one can be happy without them, just because it's a fine day and one is young and has the little one needs. Let them think what they like! Am I thinking of them? Of them! Haven't they ever looked at themselves?"

She herself looked at them; and as she was in a state of grace (that is, of gay freedom) she certainly did not idealize them. Far from it. She asked herself how one could possibly fall in love with a man. Man was certainly not a beautiful animal. One would have to have lost one's head to find him attractive. And the daughter

of Rivière, who was a good Frenchwoman, of the strong classical type, a reader of Rabelais and Molière, repeated to herself Dorine's remark to Tartuffe.

She made fun of love. (Ah, how she deceived herself!) She defied it, and she carried it in her heart. Sly and apparently asleep, it was awaiting its hour. These little skirmishes were preparations for the real attack. The enemy was approaching. The friend. . . .

Who could have suspected him? Anyone else, perhaps. But this man—what an idea!

Julien Dumont was just about the age of Annette, between twenty-nine and thirty years old. Of middling height, with a slight stoop, a rather sad face and one that would have been unattractive without the fine, brown, gentle, serious eyes that were humbly caressing when one overcame their shyness, a bony forehead, with a depression in the middle, a big nose, pronounced cheek-bones, a short black beard, an affectionate mouth that was concealed under a very long moustache—it was Julien's almost invariable habit to conceal whatever was least ugly about him—the dull, old-ivory complexion of a man who has been nourished more by books than by sunlight. A face that lacked neither intelligence nor goodness, but was rather depressed and languid, a face that life and the passions had not yet marked. In his whole appearance there was something walled-in, something despondent.

He was more ingenuous and inexperienced than Annette, who was still a good deal so herself. For, in spite of her brief experience, an experience that had been more violent than extensive, she did not know very much about the world of love. It is true that the intuition she owed to her father and her talks with Sylvie, which some-

times quite equalled those of the Queen of Navarre, had not left her ignorant of anything. But the lesson is badly learned which the heart has not studied at its own expense. Words are not of the same stuff as reality. And one sometimes fails to recognize what one has read about when one meets it in life. Annette, who had been well taught, had almost everything to learn. Julien had to learn everything.

He had lived without love. We hesitate in France to speak of "innocents" of this kind: they provoke the easy pleasantries of an intelligent race that does not vary to any great extent in the forms of its wit. There are many of these innocents. Whether it is the result of religious scruples, or moral puritanism, or a deep-seated and sometimes unwholesome timidity, or (and this is most frequently the case) an overwhelming burden of work that absorbs their years of youth, a life of poverty, toil, a repugnance for vulgar love affairs, a respect for the future, for the one who is coming (who is not coming)—in every case, no doubt, a certain cold-bloodedness lies at the bottom of their attitude. The Nordic heart is slow to awaken, though this may mean, not that the passions are going to lack force in the future, but merely that they are gathering and being held in reserve. There are many of these innocents, and the happy young people about them pay no attention to them. Innocents are left empty-handed; they are left out of everything. Julien knew scarcely anything about life except through his intelligence.

The child of a bourgeois family, poor, laborious, which included only his two parents, the father an obscure professor who had worked himself to death, the mother devoted to her son, who returned the devotion, deeply re-

ligious, a practising Catholic, a believer, with liberal ideas, an unbroken, monotonous life of labor, coldly illumined by the severe joy of conscience and habit, with no interest in politics, a distaste for every sort of public activity, a profound love of the hidden, inner, domestic life, he was a truly honest, modest soul, with a sense of the value of the strong, humble virtues. And deep down in his heart was a flower of poetry.

He was an assistant teacher of science at a lycée. He had known Annette years before at the University, when they were twenty. From the very first he had been attracted by her. But Annette, who was rich at that time, popular, radiant with youth and happy egoism, carelessly distant, intimidated Julien. Her bolder companions assumed with her the place that he would have liked to take. He envied them, but he did not try to rival them; he considered himself inferior, ugly, awkward, ill-dressed; he was unable to express himself and gave a false idea of his intelligence and his sincerity. The sense of his physical uncouthness paralysed him all the more because he was susceptible to beauty, and Annette inspired in him an unexpressed emotion. For he thought her beautiful; unlike his companions who paid court to her, he did not have a sufficiently free mind to observe cavalierly the imperfections that accompanied her attractions, the strongly marked eyebrows, the prominent eyes, the short nose. He did not see these details. But he alone of all these young men grasped the harmony of this living form, he alone understood it; for, although most people stop at the mere external pattern, every form expresses an inner meaning. Julien did not separate in his own mind Annette's eyes, her forehead, her heavy eyebrows from her energy of character and vigorous mentality. He saw

her from a distance, simply, summarily; but he saw her truly, more truly, at this first glance, than when he came nearer and tried to know her better. He was one of those far-sighted spirits that are embarrassed at close range. Sometimes they have genius and stumble at every step.

Julien and Annette happened to meet again one morning in the great windowed hall on the first floor of the Library of Sainte-Geneviève. It was nearly ten years since they had seen each other, and Julien had prudently avoided thinking of the image that rose before him today. He lifted his eyes from his book. On the other side of the table, a few steps away, he caught sight of her reading. Over her beautiful auburn hair was a fur toque; her cloak was thrown back from her shoulders. (It was still winter, though Easter was approaching; and the hall, into which the icy air of the square filtered through the great windows, was never warm enough. Julien had kept his own coat-collar turned up, but she, with her neck exposed, did not feel the cold.) With one elbow on the table and her chin resting on the back of her hand, she had the familiar attitude which he had seen so long ago, her brow bending forward, her blond eyebrows knit, and the eyes running down the page, while she nibbled the end of her pencil. He felt again as he had felt at twenty. But it did not occur to him to get up and speak to her.

In spite of the ardor with which she had applied herself to reading, as she applied herself to everything, Annette's mind was still pursuing more than one single thought. The ideas she had come to find in a book, and that really attracted her, rarely presented themselves without a procession of images which had very little in common among

themselves. She drove them away; but, as moment followed moment, the indiscreet images came back and knocked at the door. The most intellectual woman never completely forgets herself in what she is reading; the current within her is too strong. Annette interrupted her reading to open the flood-gate for a moment.

As she thus stopped, casting about her a rather troubled glance, her eye encountered that of Julien: it was fixed upon her. The image of Julien seemed to her a part of what was passing through her mind. Then, suddenly awakening—as when, in the morning, on her pillow, she found herself all at once in the midst of life—she rose gaily and stretched out her hand to him across the table.

Julien, who was embarrassed, awkwardly went over and sat down beside her. They began to talk. Julien said little. He was stunned by this unexpected pleasure. Annette took everything into her own hands. She was delighted; a happy past reappeared before her. Julien played a very minor part in this: he was a mere link in the chain, and as the figures of the dance unfolded Julien was soon far away. But he thought he still saw himself in Annette's laughing eyes, and in his confusion he scarcely knew what he was saying to her in reply. He did his best (the clumsy soul!) to conceal the admiration she aroused in him. She still seemed beautiful to him, more beautiful than ever, but closer, more human, somehow new. . . . In what way? He knew nothing about her; the last thing he had heard was the death of her father six years before. He lived a solitary life; the gossip of Paris never reached him. . . . He asked if Annette was still living in the Boulogne house.

"What, don't you know? It's a long time since I moved away from there. Yes, they put me out of it."

He did not understand. She hastily explained, with an air of gaiety, that she had been ruined by her own fault, her indifference to business.

"It was a very good thing!" she added.

And she spoke of other matters. Not a word about her life. She had no desire to conceal it, but it was no concern of others. If Julien had insisted, asked some question, she would have replied with the exact truth. But he asked nothing, he would not have dared. His mind was lost in this one thought: she was poor, poor like himself. Already the fiery wind of hope had entered him.

To disguise his feeling he leaned, with a gruff camaraderie, over the pamphlet she had just laid down.

"What are you reading here?"

He turned the leaves. A scientific review. There was a file of them.

"Yes," said Annette, "I am trying to catch up with things. It's not easy. I have lost ground during these five years; I have to earn my living, giving lessons, and I haven't the time. I am taking advantage of Easter. No more lessons. I'm resting. I am trying to make up for lost time. I am taking double doses, you see. [She pointed to the open reviews that surrounded her.] I should like to swallow them all. But it's too much. I can't manage it; I have to learn everything all over again. Such an immense number of things have happened since I have been out of the running; they allude to works that I don't know. . . . Heavens, how quickly things move! But I shall catch up with them again! I swear I shan't be left behind on the road like a cripple. There are fine things to be seen out there. I want to see them."

Julien drank in her words. Of all she was saying what remained in his mind was this: she was earning her liv-

ing under difficulties, and she was laughing. She rose in his admiration to a height which the old Annette had never attained. And she dragged him along with her. For this joy, which he did not possess, she brought to him.

They went out together. Julien was proud to find himself in the company of this beautiful woman; he could not get over his surprise that she should have remembered him so well. In the old days she had hardly seemed to notice that he existed. And here she was recalling to him little forgotten events in which he was concerned. She asked about Julien's mother. He was so touched that his embarrassment vanished; haltingly, he began to tell her about himself; he was tongue-tied. Annette listened to him with gentle irony; she would have liked to prompt him. He was still at the beginning and his assurance was coming back when she held out her hand to bid him goodbye. He had just time to ask her if she was going to be at the library again, and he was overjoyed to hear her say, "Tomorrow."

Julien went home in utter confusion. He was ashamed of himself, but tomorrow he would make up for it. Today he only wanted to think of the miracle of this friendship. On her side, Annette, who was submerged in Sylvie's environment, was pleased to have found again a comrade of her intellectual years. Not that he was very enlivening—hardly that—but he was a serious, sympathetic, honest boy. . . . What an icicle!

She had no reason the next day to change her opinion. Julien only thawed out when he was alone at home. The moment he saw Annette again, the ice at once returned. He was filled with consternation. He had prepared many things to say, prepared a conversation as he would have

prepared a lecture, but under Annette's eyes nothing remained of it all. There was only a tasteless extract left of the recitation that he had warmed up in himself so many times. Even he was bored as he heard himself reeling it off. He only recovered his equilibrium when they began to discuss science and he himself was not in question. On that ground he was precise and clear and even became quite lively. Annette could have asked nothing more. Eager to learn, she pressed him with questions that interested Julien by their intelligence; she was so quick in imagining, though she often guessed wrong, and at a word she would turn up at the exact point whither he wished to lead her. He liked this attentive face, these eyes that plunged into his to reach his thought more quickly, and then suddenly lighted up. She had understood! The joy of thought shared in common, and this invisible sun and the immense perspective illumined by its light, the joy of travelling together towards discovery by new roads where he was her guide! It was delicious to talk in this way, in the peaceful seclusion of this hall of books, this church of the mind.

Delicious for him, but not for those who were near them. For he talked too loud: he had forgotten that other people existed. Annette smilingly told him that he must be silent and rose to go out. He followed her. But once in the street again, with the table and the books no longer before them, he became the same impotent soul whom Annette had seen the day before. She tried to make him talk of himself, but her labor was lost. And he could not make up his mind to leave her; he wanted to take her back to the door of her house. He was stiff, nervous, abrupt from embarrassment—at moments, unintentionally, even rather impolite. . . . He was a fearful

bore! Annette, slightly irritated, thought, "How the devil can I get rid of him?"

Julien perceived the mocking curve in this mouth that said nothing. He stopped suddenly and remarked, in a tone of distress, "O forgive me, I'm boring you. . . . Yes, I know it, I know it! I am such a bore! I don't know how to talk. I am not used to it. I live alone. My mother is good, very good, but I can't tell her about my thoughts. Many of them would upset her; she wouldn't understand them. And I have never known anybody who was interested in them. I don't expect it. You have been good to listen to me so indulgently. I have let myself go on because I wanted to tell you. . . . But it isn't possible. One can't tell things, one should keep them to oneself. It isn't interesting, it isn't manly. Live and be silent. I ask your pardon for having bored you."

Annette was touched. There was real feeling in these words. This mixture of modesty and sad pride struck her; she felt the disappointment and the wounded affection under the shell of coldness. In one of those bursts of emotion which she could not resist, she was seized with a kindly pity for Julien. She said warmly, "No, no, don't regret anything. I thank you. It was quite right of you to talk"—she corrected herself with a touch of mockery that had no sharpness in it this time—"to try to talk. Yes, it isn't easy. You are not used to it. . . . Well, I'm glad you are not used to it. There are plenty of others who are! But there is nothing to prevent me from hoping that I shall make you get used to it. Are you willing? Since you have no one with whom you can talk?"

Julien was too much moved to reply, but his look expressed a gratitude that was still shy. Although it was past the hour when she should have been at home, An-

nette retraced her steps so that they might still have a few minutes together; and she talked to him with a kind, motherly camaraderie, in a simple, cordial tone that was like a cool hand laid on his aching forehead. Yes, he had been hurt, this big boy; with his moody air he needed to be handled very gently. He was coming back to life now. But she had to go in. . . . Annette suggested seeing him again from time to time. And they confessed that, as for the work they had done in the library, they might have done it just as well in the Luxembourg Gardens, or . . .

"Or . . . why not at my house?"

And Annette, inviting him for some Sunday soon, vanished without waiting for a reply.

Ah, how well he might have talked, now that she was no longer there! He went over the whole scene; he felt how kind Annette was. And since this man, who was so well balanced in his intellectual life, was unable to preserve any measure in the things of the heart, he slipped without transition from the thought that his feeling was destined to remain unreturned to the thought that perhaps . . .

XVIII

Annette had not the least suspicion of what was taking place in Julien. The unengaging appearance of her new companion seemed a guarantee against love, and she thought that in some comic fashion it would also guarantee Julien. She respected him. She pitied him. Pitied, he became sympathetic. It was pleasant to tell herself that she could do him good; and he became more sympa-

thetic to her. But it would never have occurred to her to be on her guard against him, still less against herself.

She had forgotten her invitation when, on the following Sunday, he came to recall it to her; and the joyous surprise with which she greeted him was not assumed. But Julien who, for a week, had been thinking of nothing but this moment, did not see the surprise and saw only the joy. And his own increased. The weather was very bad. Annette had not thought of going out this afternoon. As she was not expecting anybody; she was in négligé, and so was the apartment. The baby had been playing there. It is useless to have, as Annette had, a love of order; children oblige one to give it up, along with so many fine plans that one has formed without considering them. But Julien, referring everything to himself, saw in this disorder no artistic effect, but a sign of some intimacy that Annette wished to accord him. He came in with a beating heart, but with his mind made up to appear this time in an advantageous light; he assumed an air of assurance. It was not becoming to him, and Annette, who was annoyed at being surprised in this confusion, was angry because the intruder was so unceremonious. She at once became cold, and in an instant Julien's pride was broken. So they remained, each as stiff as the other, the one not daring to utter another word, the other waiting with an air of malicious *hauteur*.

"If you imagine, my dear boy, that I am going to help you today!"

And then she saw the ridiculous side of the situation. She saw with the corner of her eye the piteous look of the conqueror, and she laughed out loud. Suddenly relaxed, she resumed the comradely tone. Julien did not understand it at all: disconcerted but relieved, he too became

natural again, and at last a friendly conversation sprang up between them.

Annette told him about her working life, and they confessed to one another that they were not made for their occupations. Julien was passionately interested in the science which he taught, but . . .

"They can't follow me! They look at me with their dull eyes blinking with sleep; there are hardly two or three who have a glimmer of understanding; the rest are a heavy mass of boredom. If you sweat blood and water, you can sometimes (not always) stir it for a moment, but it always falls back into the pond. Try to fish it out again! It's work for a well-digger. But it isn't their fault, the unhappy brats. They are just like ourselves; they are victims of the democratic mania according to which all minds absorb equally the same sum of knowledge—before the normal age when they might begin to understand! Then come the examinations, the agricultural matches, when they weigh these products of ours who are crammed with a mixture of lame words and formless notions. Most of these they hastily disgorge immediately afterwards, and they are disgusted with learning for the rest of their lives."

"Now I," said Annette, laughing, "like children very much, yes, even the most unattractive ones. I am not indifferent to any of them. I should like to have them all, I should like to hug them all. But one has to limit oneself. Isn't that so? It's enough to have one. . . ."

(She pointed to the disorderly room, but he did not understand and smiled stupidly.)

"It's a pity! When I see one who pleases me, I would like to steal him. And they all give me pleasure. There is something fresh, an infinite hope, even in the ugliest.

. . . But what can I do with them? And what can they do with me? I see so little of them. They are only in my hands for an hour. And then I run to the others. And my little ones also run from hand to hand. What one hand has done the other undoes. Nothing sticks. These little formless souls, these little soulless forms, who dance the Boston and the two-step. We run about. Everyone runs about. This life is a race-course. No one ever stops. People die, they join the dead. Ah, what unhappy souls, never granting themselves a day to collect their thoughts! And they don't grant us one either, we who would so like to have it!"

Julien understood her. He had no need to learn the value of a retreat, the horror of the tumultuous world. And their understanding increased when Annette said that fortunately, in the midst of the flood, there were still a few islets where one could take refuge, the beautiful books of the poets and especially music. The poets had little attraction for Julien; their language was beyond him. He had the strange distrust of it which is common in minds that love thought and often have their own poetry, but do not perceive the deep vibrations of the music of words. The other music, the language of sounds, is more accessible to them. Julien loved it. Unfortunately, he lacked the time and the means to go and hear it.

"I lack them too," said Annette. "But I go just the same."

Julien did not have this vitality. After his working day he stayed quietly at home. He did not know how to amuse himself. He saw a piano in the room.

"Do you play?"

"Ah, it isn't easy!" said Annette, laughing. "*He* doesn't allow it."

Julien, vaguely troubled, asked in surprise who could prevent her in this way. Annette, with her ear alert, listened to the little steps that were tapping along as they climbed the stairs. She ran and opened the door. "See, there's the monster!"

She brought Marc in. He had returned from his aunt's.

Julien did not yet understand.

"My little boy . . . Marc, will you say good-afternoon?"

Julien was astounded. It had not even occurred to Annette that he would be surprised. She went on gaily, holding Marc, who tried to escape from her, "You see, I haven't lost my time in spite of all."

Julien did not have the wit to reply. His attention was occupied in concealing his confusion. He attempted a rather foolish smile. Marc had succeeded in slipping from his mother's hands, without having said good-afternoon. (He thought this ceremony ridiculous, and he made off, leaving his mother talking, "talking and saying nothing," well knowing that the instant after she would have forgotten it in something else. There was no continuity in women.) Four steps away from Julien, in the folds of a curtain which he twisted in his embrace, Marc looked the stranger up and down with severe eyes; and in his childish way (which was fairly accurate) he had quickly sized up the situation. Decision without appeal: he did not like Julien. The question was settled.

Julien, whose embarrassment was increased by this look from the child, tried to resume the thread of the conversation while following the thread of his own thoughts. But he only succeeded in becoming more confused. He reassured himself, however. Feebly. Annette's confident

manner made it impossible for him to suspect that she was unmarried: that was out of the question. But where was the husband? Alive or dead? Annette was not in mourning. No, he was not reassured. What had become of this man? Julien did not dare to ask directly. After many detours, he finally took a chance, imagining he was very clever, and carelessly remarked, "Have you been alone very long?"

"I am not alone," said Annette. And she pointed to her child.

He learned nothing more. But since she thus admitted by implication that she was alone (with the child) and that she took it gaily, it must be because her mourning was far, very far, behind her, and she no longer thought of it. Julien's interested logic ended victoriously, "Monsieur Malbrough is dead."

Farewell to the husband! He was no longer disturbing. Julien threw one more shovelful of earth on him, and then, turning to Marc, gave the child a crooked smile. Marc was becoming sympathetic to him.

But he had not become so to Marc. He was more familiar with the constitution of the atomic bodies than with that of a child's mind. Marc fully realized that this demonstration of good nature was not natural, and the result was that he turned his back, grumbling, "I forbid him to laugh at me."

Annette, amused by Julien's useless efforts to win over the child, thought she ought to make up for Marc's ungracious greeting. She questioned Julien about his solitary life with an interest that wandered a little at first, but soon ceased to do so. Julien, who was always more sure of himself when he was sitting in the half-light of a room, talked about himself this time quite frankly. He

was simple; he never, or hardly ever, posed, in spite of his desire to please. In his sincerity he revealed a candour that one seldom meets in Paris in a man of his age. When he touched upon subjects that were dear to him, he had a delicacy that veiled a restrained emotion. In these moments of abandon when, in the kindly silence of the encouraging Annette, his true inner nature seemed to blossom, a gleam of moral beauty lighted up his face. Annette looked at him attentively, and what she felt for him was no longer merely a friendly indifference.

After this they saw each other regularly on Sundays and a little oftener during the week, when they had a free moment. Julien used as a pretext the books which he lent her; it was quite necessary to accompany them with explanations so that Annette should have less difficulty in understanding them. He brought Marc some rather expensive but badly chosen presents for which the little enemy was by no means grateful to him: he thought them childish and beneath his dignity. But nothing could shake Julien's good will, firmly resolved as he was not to see anything that would disturb him. Solitary spirits who distrust the world lose all discernment, all desire to be discerning, the moment they abandon their distrust in favor of some chosen soul: they are liberated. Julien's mind, ingenious in deceiving itself, arranged to its satisfaction the memories it brought back from each of its visits: everything that Annette had said and everything that surrounded her. (Without being conscious of it, he indirectly glorified himself.) Annette's inattentiveness, her wandering replies, even the bored silences which he sometimes caused her, all rendered her more beautiful and more touching to him. And as, each time, he still discovered some new little trait, which did not accord with

the portrait he had made, he kept remaking the portrait, he made it over ten times; and although the portrait no longer resembled what it had been at the beginning, Julien never admitted that there had been a change in its essential constancy. He was ready to alter his ideal of love as many times as the beloved object altered.

Annette had become aware of his love for her. She was amused by it at first, then touched, then grateful, a little, a good deal, in spite of everything. ("The least handsome boy in the world can only give what he has. Thank you, my good Julien.") Then she was a little troubled. She told herself frankly that she should not allow him to start down that slope. But it gave the boy so much happiness, and certainly it was not displeasing to her. Annette was susceptible to affection; susceptible also to gentle attentions, the flattery of tenderness. Too much so, perhaps. She confessed it. Love, the admiration she read in his eyes were for her a caress that she could not but wish to have repeated. . . . Yes, she admitted it: perhaps it was not quite right, but it was so natural! She would have to make some little effort to deprive herself of it. She did so, but she had no luck; everything she said to push Julien away from her (did she really say everything?) attracted him all the more. It was a fatality! One has to resign oneself to a fatality. She laughed at herself, while Julien, troubled, wondered if she was not laughing at him.

"Hypocrite, hypocrite! Haven't you any shame?"

She had no shame. Can one resist pleasing a heart that has surrendered itself into one's hands? It brightens one's days. And what harm does it do? What is the danger? As long as one is calm and master of oneself and desires only what is good, the good of the other person!

She did not know that one of the insidious paths through which love finds its way is the fond vanity of believing that one is necessary—that feeling which is so strong in the heart of a true woman: it satisfies her double need of doing good, which she confesses, and of pride, which she does not confess. It is so strong that when she has a well-developed soul she often prefers the man for whom she cares less, but whom she can protect, to the man for whom she cares more, but who can get along without her. Is not this the essence of maternity? Suppose the big boy were to remain the little chick as long as he lived! The woman with a mother's heart, like Annette, finds it easy to attribute to a man whose love appeals to her a charm he does not possess. Her instinct disposes her to observe only his good qualities. Julien had plenty of these. Annette rejoiced to see his timidity vanishing and his real nature, which had been repressed, expanding in the daylight with the soft happiness of the convalescent. She said to herself that hitherto no one had understood this man, not even the mother of whom he was always talking and of whom she was beginning to be jealous. As for poor Julien, he did not know himself. . . . Who would have suspected that under this rough shell there was a tender, delicate soul? . . . (She was exaggerating.) . . . He needed confidence and he had lacked it: confidence in others, confidence in himself. To believe in himself he needed another believer. Well, she believed! She believed in Julien, for Julien's sake, so much that she ended by believing in him also for her own. . . . He blossomed under her eye as a plant in the sunlight. And it is good to be the sun for somebody else. "Open, my heart!" Was it to Julien's heart or her own that she was speaking? Already she had ceased to know. For she

too was blossoming as a result of the good she was doing. An abundant nature dies if it cannot nourish others from itself. "To give myself!"

Annette gave too much. She was irresistible. Julien no longer concealed his passion. And Annette—a little late—recognized that she was in danger.

When she saw love rising within her, she threw up a feeble defence; she tried not to take Julien's feelings seriously. But she did not believe herself, and all she did was to make Julien more importunate. He became pathetic.

Then she was seized with fear. She besought him not to love her, to let them remain good friends.

"Why?" he asked. "Why?"

She did not want to say. She had an instinctive fear of love; she remembered what she had suffered through it, and an intuition warned her of what she would have to suffer again. She summoned it and she drove it away from her; she desired it and she fled from it. Julien's entreaties she resisted sincerely, and in the bottom of her heart she prayed that her adversary might conquer her resistance.

The combat would have dragged on if a certain event had not hastened the issue.

XIX

With her sister's husband Annette was on terms of the frankest friendship. This good soul, for all his slight vulgarity, lacked neither heart nor integrity. Annette respected him, and Leopold treated her with a rather ceremonious consideration. Ever since their first meet-

ings he had gathered that she belonged to a different species from his and Sylvie's; she intimidated him. He was all the more grateful for the kindness she showed him. At the time when he was paying court to Sylvie, she had been his ally; more than once she had come to his aid when he was exposed to the ridicule of his fiancée, who was too sure of her power not to abuse it. Later she had even discreetly interposed in misunderstandings in the household, or when Sylvie yielded to sudden whims, crotchets and deviltries, now and then, escaping from her own vexations by vexing her husband. Leopold, who did not understand such things, would come and tell his troubles to Annette, who undertook to bring Sylvie back to reason. He had even gone so far as to confide to his sister-in-law more than one matter which he had not mentioned to his wife. Sylvie was not unaware of this, and she teased Annette, who took it gaily. Everything was natural and frank among the three. Leopold had never complained of the place held in his home by his wife's sister and the little boy, though they were often rather in the way; he thought, in fact, that Sylvie did not do enough to help Annette, whose courage he admired; and he spoiled the child. Annette, who knew through Sylvie what Leopold thought, was grateful to him.

The period of Sylvie's pregnancy was not, for those about her, especially the husband, a happy time. Frequent discords drove Leopold and his consort apart. Not that Sylvie meant to get along without him. She thought very little about her maternity and was unwilling to make any change in her manner of living. But he did think about it. Those long months of gestation were far from being for her what they had been for Annette, an endless dream of languid happiness that was finished too soon. Sylvie

was not made to brood on dreams. She was impatient and had no intention of giving up one of her duties, one of her rights or one of her pleasures: she overtaxed herself. Her health was affected by her nervous state, and her character did not gain by it. When one is tormented, one is glad to torment others. Sylvie, who was uncomfortable, was indignant because her husband was not; and she undertook to make him so. She harassed him with her teasing, malicious, perpetually changing moods. She was even (unexpectedly enough) jealously amorous, though this did not prevent her from abusing him. There were days when he did not know which way to turn.

Annette was at hand to receive his lamentations. He would climb up to her floor, complaining; she would listen to him patiently, and she found a way to make him laugh at his little misfortunes. These meetings, as they went on, established between them a sort of complicity, for they had so many feelings in common. And sometimes, in Sylvie's presence, they would exchange a malicious glance. Perfectly honest, both of them, they took no precautions and abandoned themselves to a familiarity which, if it was innocent, was not entirely harmless. Annette did not dream that there was any risk, and these friendly coquetries amused her. Leopold was captivated by them; he asked for nothing better. He had been attracted for a long time by the radiant force of joy that issued from her. Just at that moment Annette was discovering Julien's love, and it troubled her deliciously. The rest of the world was all a haze. When she had just seen Julien, and Leopold was talking to her, she listened to Leopold and replied to him, but it was to Julien that she was smiling. Leopold had no means of guessing this.

He knew what he wanted. He resisted like a decent fellow. But a decent fellow is a man. He should not play with fire.

One Sunday in May the four of them, Sylvie, Annette, Leopold and little Marc, went for a walk in the direction of Sceaux. After an hour of strolling, Sylvie, who was a little tired, sat down at the foot of a slope and said, "Well, young people, climb it if you want to! You will find us still here."

She remained behind with the child. Annette and Leopold went gaily on. Annette was animated, joyous, the best of company. Leopold, with his jolly talk, eased the moral tension in which Julien's love and his intellectual conversation held her. The path wound between the long wall of a great estate and a rise of ground covered with flowering bushes. Through the holes in the hedges they saw, as they climbed, the sloping orchards with their white and pink tufts.

A fantastic sky, with the busy clouds racing over its delicate blue. The laughing wind, like a young dog, bit them by fits and starts. Annette was walking ahead, picking flowers, singing. Leopold was following her; he watched her bending over, watched her robust frame under the tightly fitting dress, her bare hands, her bare neck, reddened by the lash of the wind, and amid the foaming hair the red shell of her ear, the tip of which looked like a drop of blood. The slope rose again to the right, and the road formed a passage in which the rushing wind streamed down upon them. Annette, without turning, asked her companion a question. He did not reply. She went on, bending over, picking flowers and talking. And as she joked with Leopold, who was silent, it suddenly occurred to her that there was something dangerous

in this silence. She let her flowers fall. She straightened herself, but she did not have time to turn when . . . she almost fell. He had clasped her in his arms. She had been brutally seized, and she felt on her neck a panting breath. An eager mouth was kissing her throat, her cheeks. Instantly stiffening, bracing herself, with all her unconscious fighting forces collected, with her chest and her spine she furiously shook the man who had seized her: she broke his hold and found herself face to face with the aggressor. Her eyes flamed with anger, but he did not relax his grip. A rough struggle followed, like that of animals that hate each other. Rough and brief. Annette, whose outraged instincts gave her an added strength, violently repulsed the man, and he tripped and stumbled. He remained there before her, doubly humiliated, panting, scarlet, and they looked at each other with rage in their eyes. Not a word was said. Suddenly Annette clambered up the bank, crept through a hole in the hedge to the other side, and fled. Leopold, who had come to his senses, called after her. She stopped twenty paces away and would not let him approach. They redescended the hill on different sides of the hedge, keeping their distances, on their guard, hostile and ashamed. Leopold, in a changed voice, implored Annette to come back, begged her pardon. Annette turned a deaf ear towards him, but she heard him: the confusion of this voice reached her through the barrier of her bitterness. She slackened her pace.

"Annette!" he besought her. "Annette! Don't run away! I don't want to pursue you. See, I'm staying here, I shan't come near you. I've behaved like a brute. I'm ashamed, ashamed. Call me any names you like, but don't run away. I shall never touch you again, not even with

the tip of my finger. I'm disgusted with myself. I ask your pardon on my knees!"

He knelt down awkwardly on the pebbles. He looked utterly wretched. He was ridiculous.

Annette, who was listening to him in cold silence, motionless, with her face turned away, threw him a side-glance without looking at him. She saw this humiliated man. She was touched by his humiliation; her warm heart had the faculty of opening to the emotions of others as if they were her own, and she blushed at Leopold's shame. She made a movement towards him and said, "Get up!"

He rose, and she instinctively recoiled a few steps. "You are still afraid," he said. "You will never forgive me."

"Don't speak of it any more," she answered dryly. "It's ended."

They descended the road again. Annette was dumb and frozen. He had difficulty in keeping silent. He was mortified, and he was trying to justify himself. But he was not very eloquent, the poor man. His style was not exactly noble. "I am a dirty cur!" he repeated angrily.

Annette, still agitated, repressed a smile. Her mind was in a tumult, and she found difficulty in calming it. She felt at the same time the loathsomeness and the absurdity of the scene. She had not forgiven him, and she was ready to pity the man who was accusing himself so pathetically beside her. He continued to flounder. She listened to him with bitterness, compassion, irony. He struggled to explain "this filthy madness that passes through your body." . . . Yes, this madness, she knew it, although it was not the time to tell him so. But he looked so wretched that, in spite of herself, she said to

him, "I know. One is mad sometimes. What's done is done."

They continued on their way, without speaking, their hearts heavy, sad and embarrassed. Just as they were arriving at the spot where they had left Sylvie, Annette made a gesture as if she were about to hold out her hand to Leopold. But instead of doing so, she said, "I've forgotten it."

He was relieved, though he was still troubled. Like a schoolboy caught in some misdemeanor, he asked, "You won't say anything about it?"

Annette gave him a little pitying smile.

No, she said nothing. But at the first glance the sharp eye of Sylvie had seen it all. She asked no questions. They spoke of other things. And while all three, to hide their thoughts, made a great parade of chattering all the way home, Sylvie observed the two others.

From that day forward Annette and Leopold were never again alone together. The jealous one was always watching; Annette too was on her guard. In spite of herself she allowed her distrust to be visible. And Leopold, who was hurt, brooded over his unconfessed bitterness.

XX

Annette's eyes were opened. She could no longer remain undistrustful of herself and others. She could no longer pass along, laughing, as she had done before, heedless, because she did not seek them, of the desires she aroused. Society being as it is, customs being as they are, her situation as a single woman, young and free, not only

exposed her to pursuit, but legitimized it. No one could believe that she had freed herself, in the boldest fashion, in order to shut herself up afterwards in a widowhood the constancy of which was without an object. She imagined she had changed with maternity, and no doubt maternity was a great flame. But another flame still burned in her. She tried to forget it, because she was afraid of it; and she imagined that no one saw it. But this was not so; in spite of her, the fire of love burned on. And other people, if not she, were in danger of being its victims. Leopold's adventure had shown her this. It was hideous. She was revolted by it. In the disillusioned eyes of one who is not in love, the act of love seems a grotesque or disgusting bestiality. As Annette saw it, Leopold's attempt was both. But Annette did not have a calm conscience. She had fanned these desires. She remembered her thoughtless coquetries, her arts, the provocations she had given him. What had driven her into them? That repressed force, that inner fire which she was obliged to foster or stifle. Stifle it one cannot, one should not! It is the sunlight of life. Without it, everything is plunged in shadow. But at least it should not consume that to which it ought to give life, like the chariot that was given into the hands of Phaëton. Let it follow its regular course through the sky! Marriage then? After having so long avoided it, the perception of the dangers that menaced her led her to tell herself that a marriage of affection and esteem, of calm sympathy, would be a bulwark against the demons of the heart and a protection against pursuit from without. The more she convinced herself (and everything conspired to convince her: her material and moral security, the attraction of a home and the solicitations of her heart), the less resistance she opposed to Julien's sup-

plications. In order to yield to them, she went over all the reasons she had for loving him. But she did not wait for these reasons in order to love him. For already there had begun within her that construction of the mind which creates an exalted vision of the chosen one. Julien had preceded her in this, but as she had a richer and more passionate nature she had soon outdistanced him.

No longer on her guard, surrendering to the ardor of her frank nature, she used none of those artifices with which a cleverer woman masks her defeat when her heart is captured and she allows people to believe that she is still mistress of it. Annette had made a gift of hers. She told Julien. And from that very moment Julien began to be uneasy.

He knew very little about women. They fascinated him and disconcerted him. Rather than know them he preferred to judge them. He idealized some, he condemned others. Towards those who fell into neither of the two categories he remained indifferent. Very young men—and Julien, owing to the slightness of his experience, had remained very young—are always hasty in their judgments. As they are full of themselves and their desires, they seek in others only for what they wish to find. Whether on the moral or the carnal side, naïve persons are like roués in one respect: when they love they are always thinking of themselves and never of the woman. They refuse to see that she exists outside of them. Love is the one test that can teach them. It teaches the few who are capable of learning—but generally to their cost and that of their partners; for when at last they know it is too late. The naïve astonishment, old as the ages, that bewails the irreducible duality which is the bitter fruit of love, that disappointed dream of unity, is the usual re-

sult of this initial misunderstanding. For what does "love" mean if it is not "loving someone else"? Without possessing the egoism of Roger Brissot, Julien, through ignorance, had no less difficulty in getting outside of himself; and he had a still more limited view of the feminine universe. He needed to be led prudently by the hand.

Prudent was the one thing Annette was not by nature, and love did not teach her. It gave her the need of a generous confidence. Now that she was sure of loving and being loved, she concealed nothing. Nothing in the man she loved could have repelled her: why should she paint herself up? She was healthy-minded, and she did not blush at being what she was. Whoever loved her should see her as she was! She had clearly seen Julien's naïveté, his lack of understanding, his alarm. She found a tender and malicious pleasure in them. She was glad that she was the first to reveal to him a feminine soul.

One day she went to surprise him in his apartment. His mother opened the door. An old lady, with gray hair tightly drawn across a calm brow that was lighted up by two severe, watchful eyes, she inspected Annette with a distrustful politeness and showed her into a neat, cold little drawing-room with horsehair furniture.

Dull family photographs and pictures from museums added a finishing touch to the freezing atmosphere of the room. Annette waited alone. After a whispered consultation in the adjoining bedroom, Julien dashed in. He was delighted and he was frightened; he did not know what to say. He spoke absent-mindedly. They were sitting in uncomfortable chairs with stiff backs that thwarted every natural movement. Between them was one of those drawing-room tables that you cannot lean upon, tables

with sharp edges that hurt your knees. The cold glitter of the carpetless floor and the dead faces under glass, like plants in a herbarium, congealed the words on their lips and made them lower their voices. This drawing-room absolutely froze Annette. Was Julien going to keep her here during the whole of her call? She asked him if he did not want to show her the room where he worked. He could not refuse, he even wanted to do so. But he looked so hesitant that she said, "Would you rather not?"

He protested, explaining that it was not in order, and took her in. It was in much better order than her own rooms had been at the time of Julien's first call, but there was no air of gaiety in Julien's room. It served him both for working and sleeping. Books, a well-known engraving that represented Pasteur, papers on the chairs, a pipe on the table, a student's bed. She noticed overhead a little crucifix with a branch of boxwood. Settled in the badly upholstered arm-chair, she tried to put her host at his ease by gaily recalling to him the memory of their student days. She talked without prudery of what they both knew. But he was distrait, embarrassed by her presence and her freedom of speech; he seemed preoccupied with what was going on in the next room. Annette, embarrassed by contagion, held out bravely and succeeded in making him forget the "what will she think of it?" At last he became quite lively and they had a good laugh. When she got up to go he became awkward again, leading her out. In the corridor they passed the mother's room; the door was ajar; Mme. Dumont, from discretion or in order not to have to speak to the stranger, pretended not to see them. The two women had only exchanged a glance, and they were enemies already. Mme. Dumont, the mother, was shocked by the call of this bold girl with

her free and easy ways, her clear voice, her laughter, her animation: she scented danger. And Annette, who, during the visit, had perceived between Julien and herself this invisible presence, had felt angry: passing the room of the old lady who turned her back on her, she spoke and laughed more loudly still. And she jealously thought, "I'm going to take him away from her."

A week later, Julien came in turn, one evening, after dinner. He had had his first discussion with his mother on the subject of Annette; and he meant to assert his will. They were alone. Leopold had taken little Marc to the circus. When Julien left her, a little before eleven o'clock, Annette suggested walking back with him for the pleasure of enjoying together the fresh night air. But when they reached his door, Julien was troubled at the idea of leaving Annette to return alone. She made fun of his fear. None the less, he insisted on going back with her again, and she did not protest. She would have him all the longer with her! So they returned by the most roundabout way; and without quite knowing how they got there, they found themselves on a steep bank of the Seine. It was a June night. They sat down on a bench. The poplars rustled above the dark water in which were spread the reddish and yellow lights of the lamps on the bridges. The sky was far away, the stars were feeble, as if the monstrous city had drawn all the life out of them. The darkness was above and the light below. They were silent. Words could no longer express their thoughts, but, without looking at each other, each read the other's mind. Julien's desire set Annette's heart aflame; but his timidity kept him bound and motionless, and he did not dare even to lift his eyes to her. She smiled and watched him, without turning her head, as she kept her

eyes upon the red reflexions on the river; he could not make up his mind! Then she leaned towards him and kissed him.

Drunk with love and gratitude, he kissed her in return, while the insidious point of a dull anxiety fastened itself in his brain. A harsh remark of his mother's: "These bold, poverty-stricken girls who are trying to find somebody to marry them. . . ." He had pulled it angrily out not long before, but the tip of the sting had remained under the skin. He was ashamed. Mentally he asked Annette's pardon. He knew that the insulting suspicion was false. He believed in her religiously, but he was troubled. And each new visit troubled him more. Annette's freedom, the freedom of her manners, the freedom of her ideas, the freedom of her opinions on every kind of subject—especially on social morality—her calm lack of prejudices, terrified him. He was as narrow in his way of thinking as in his dress, rather dull in his ideas, inclined to severity. She, on the other hand, was generously indulgent and full of laughter. It did not occur to him that she might be as much of a Puritan as he where she herself was concerned, while with an ironical tolerance she applied to others their own measure. Tolerance and irony disconcerted him. She saw this; and when he expressed himself on some question with an unjust and excessive harshness she did not attempt to oppose his way of thinking; she smiled at this naïve rigidity which did not displease her. Her smile disturbed Julien more than her words. He had the impression that she knew more than he. It was true. But how much more? And just what did she know? What experience had she had?

Like his mother—and some of his mother's spiteful remarks had contributed to make him so—this man of fine

but impoverished vitality was vaguely alarmed by the brilliant health, the radiance of this woman. He had the most ardent desire for her, but he was afraid of her. In the walks they took together he felt that he cut a poor figure. Annette's perfect poise in every company added to his embarrassment. And although she would have liked this embarrassment if she had observed it, he was humiliated by it. But she did not observe it. She was utterly absorbed in the song within her. Annette mistakenly thought that no one but herself heard this song; and she did not see Julien's anxious glance when he asked himself, "At whom, at what, is she laughing?"

She seemed so far away!

He did not cease to see—he saw more clearly than ever—her great intellectual force, her moral energy. At the same time she remained for him a dangerous enigma. He was divided between two opposite feelings, an invincible attraction and an obscure mistrust that were like a remnant of the primitive instinct that recalls to the man and the woman of today the original enmity of the sexes, for which the carnal union was a form of combat. That suspicious instinct of defence is strongest perhaps in a man like Julien who is at once keenly intelligent and poor in experience. As it is impossible for him to see a woman just as she is, he sees her now too simply, now as full of snares.

Annette contributed to these oscillations of thought by her way of alternately saying everything and saying nothing, of revealing everything and concealing everything, her bursts of passionate expansiveness and her hermetic silences, which sometimes lasted during a good half of their walk. . . . These terrible silences—what man has not suffered from them?—during which the life of the

companion who walks at your side goes down into those regions that you will never know! . . . Not that as a usual thing they cover very profound secrets. If you plunged into them you would find that they did not rise above your heel. But whatever the depth may be, the sheet of silence is opaque: the eye cannot penetrate it. And the tormented spirit of the man has plenty of time to conjure up all sorts of alarming mysteries. The idea would never have entered the head of a Julien that he might be the author of them, that if a woman is silent it is often because she knows so well how little the man understands her. Annette's silence, which was ironical and a little weary on some days, tolerated a false interpretation of her feelings on the part of her lover, for she knew that he loved the false and did not love the true.

"If you wish . . . As you wish! . . . Of course. I am not as I am. I am as you see me."

But these silences of acquiescence only lasted for a time. From the moment Annette perceived that there might be danger in frank explanations (since Julien was unable to understand them) and that it would be more prudent to hold her peace, she spoke. To be silent in order to avoid uselessly annoying Julien, yes. But to deceive him, no. And if there was danger in speaking, all the more reason. That was the time when you couldn't avoid speaking any longer. The greater the risk, the greater was the pride that desired to brave it. This test of love made her heart beat. If the test succeeded, she would love Julien all the more. If it did not succeed? . . . It would succeed. Didn't Julien love her? Let come what might!

She played the game loyally. But there are some men who would prefer to have their partners cheat. When Sylvie learned of Julien's love and the plan for the mar-

riage, she scolded Annette: good heavens, she wasn't thinking of telling the whole truth? Of course it was absolutely necessary for him to learn a part of it. When they were married the official records would be sure to enlighten him. But there was always a way of dressing up the truth. Since this boy loved her he would close his eyes. She had only not to open them! To do so would be really too stupid! Later there would be time to tell each other everything. . . . Sylvie spoke honestly out of her experience. She wished her sister's welfare. (She wished her own too; she would not have been displeased to see them out of her house with all possible speed.) From her point of view one didn't owe the truth to everyone, especially to one's fiancé: it was enough to love him! Annette's truth, of course, was innocent, but men are weak. They cannot endure the full truth. It has to be given to them in small doses. . . .

Annette listened to Sylvie calmly and spoke of something else. Useless to reply: it would only make her more obstinate. Sylvie's morality was not hers, and she preferred not to say what she thought of it. Sylvie was Sylvie. She loved her. . . . But what a look she would have given anyone else who had spoken to her so!

"Poor Sylvie! . . . She judges men from those she has known. But my Julien belongs to another species. He loves me as I am. He will love me as I was. I have nothing to conceal from him. I have never done him an injury. If any injury was done I did it to myself alone."

Fully considering the risks, but trusting in Julien's magnanimity, she made up her mind to speak. She brought up the subject of her past life. With a common modesty, they had always avoided this topic. But more than once, Annette had read in Julien's eyes what he

burned and trembled to ask, what he wanted both to know and not to know.

She placed her hand tenderly on Julien's hand and said, "My friend, you have always been so adorably discreet with me. I thank you for it. I love you. . . . But I must tell you at last something you don't know about me, something that I have been. You must know me. I am not free from reproach."

He made an apprehensive gesture that protested against what she was going to say, as if he half wished to prevent it. She smiled.

"Don't be afraid! I haven't committed any great crimes. At least I shouldn't call them so. But perhaps I am too indulgent to myself, for the world regards these matters differently. It is for you to judge. I believe in your judgment. I am what you decide I am."

She began to tell her story. More frightened than she wanted to appear, she had prepared in advance what she intended to say. But simple as she imagined it would be to utter this, it was very painful to her. To overcome this constraint she made herself appear more free from emotion than she was. She even revealed at moments a touch of irony, directed at herself, which scarcely corresponded with the anxiety this recital stirred in her: she resorted to it in order to protect herself. . . . Julien did not understand it at all. He saw in this attitude only a shocking light-mindedness and lack of conscience.

She said first that she was not married. Julien had feared this. To tell the truth, he had even been silently sure of it. But he had always hoped that the contrary would turn out to be the case, and that Annette should tell him this, that doubt should no longer be possible, filled him with consternation. Intensely Catholic at heart,

under his superficial liberalism, he had not freed himself from the idea of sin. Instantly he thought of his mother: she would never accept it. He foresaw a struggle. He was very much in love. In spite of the grief that Annette's confession caused him, in spite of the real fall her past weakness signified for him, the "error" of her whom he loved, he loved her, he was ready, in order to have her, to fight against his mother's opposition. But someone must help him; Annette must second him. He was weak; to endure the combat, he needed to summon all his strength, not the least element of which was the strength of illusion. He needed to idealize Annette, and if Annette had been clever she would have helped him to do so.

She saw the grief which her words caused. She had expected it; she was sorry for it, but she could not spare him. Since they were to live together, each would have to take his share of the trials and even the errors of the other. But she did not suspect the conflict that was taking place in him; and if she had thought of it, she would have remained confident of the victory of love.

"My poor Julien," she said, "I am giving you pain. Forgive me. It is hard for me too. You believed that I was better than I am. You gave me a higher place, too high, in your mind. . . . I am a woman. I am weak. . . . At least, if I have made a mistake, I have never deceived anyone else. I have always acted in good faith. I have always done that."

"Yes," he said hastily. "I'm sure of it. He deceived you, didn't he?"

"Who?" asked Annette.

"That wretch. . . . Forgive me! . . . That man who left you."

"No, don't accuse him," she said. "I am the guilty one."

She attached to this word "guilty" only the sense of a warm regret for the pain she was causing him, but he seized upon it greedily. In his confusion he longed to hold fast to the idea that Annette was the victim of a seduction and that she had repented. . . . He had an extreme need of this notion of "repenting"; it was for him a kind of compensation for the hurt he had suffered, a balm for the wound it could not heal but could render endurable; it gave him a moral superiority over Annette of which—to be fair to him—he would never have made use. In short, since he had no doubt about Annette's sin, he also had none about the need of repentance. His Christian nature was imbued with both these ideas. The most liberal Christian never frees himself from them.

But Annette had sprung from a race with a different kind of soul. The Rivières might be pure or impure, in the sense that Christian morality attaches to this word; but if they were pure it was not in obedience to an invisible God or his too visible representatives and their Tables of the Law. It was because they loved purity as moral cleanliness, as beauty. And if they were impure they regarded it as an affair between themselves and their own consciences, not the consciences of others. Annette could not admit that she must give an account of herself to others. If she confessed herself to Julien, it was a gift of love that she was making him. In all honesty, she owed him merely an account of her life. But of her inner life she did not owe him any account. She gave it to him of her own free will. She saw now that Julien would have preferred to have her embellish the truth. But she was too proud to profit by a lying excuse of which she

felt no need. On the contrary, when she understood what he wanted her to say she took pains to make it clear that she had given herself to her lover.

Julien, who was completely upset, would not listen to her.

"No, no, I don't believe you," he said. "You are too generous. Don't accuse yourself to defend that man who deserves nothing but contempt."

"But I'm not accusing anyone," she said simply.

Her words struck against his consciousness, but he refused to understand.

"You are trying to exonerate him."

"I am not exonerating him. No one's to blame."

Julien struggled. "Annette, I implore you not to talk that way."

"Why?"

"You know very well it's wrong!"

"I know nothing of the kind."

"What? You don't regret anything?"

"I regret making you unhappy. But I didn't know you then, my friend. I was free and alone; I had no obligations except to myself."

"Is that nothing?" he thought. He did not dare to say it.

"But still you regret it?" he said, insistently. "You know very well you made a mistake."

He did not want to accuse her. But he so longed to have her accuse herself.

"Perhaps," she said.

"Perhaps," he took her up, dejectedly.

"I don't know," said Annette.

She saw where Julien wanted to lead her. Perhaps she had made a mistake, if yielding to a transport of sincere

love and pity was a mistake. Perhaps, yes. "But if in my heart I can regret a sincere error, I don't need to excuse myself for it. My heart has remained alone with its suffering, communing with it alone in the silence. It must commune now with its regrets. They concern nobody. . . . Regrets? . . . Let's be honest to the end! There are no regrets!" After reflecting, she said, "I don't think I made a mistake."

Perhaps she was exaggerating in reaction against Julien's unconscious pharisaism. (Poor Julien!) But even in the moments when she loved him the most she could not bring herself to utter the word of regret which he was expecting. . . . "I should so much like to say it! But I can't. It isn't true." Regret what? She had acted in accordance not only with her rights but with her happiness. For, costly as the latter had been, she had had it—the child. And she knew (she alone) that this gift of the child, far from dishonoring her, as a stupid public opinion supposed, had purified her, delivered her for a long time from her troubles, brought into her life order and peace. . . . No, for the sake of assuring her future love she would never be base enough to slander her past love. She even felt now a certain gratitude towards this Roger who had only been an agent of her destiny, so inferior to the love and the flame of life he had lighted in her.

Julien felt this jealously. "Ah, you still love that man?" he said.

"No, my friend."

"But you are not angry with him."

"Why should I be angry with him?"

"And you are thinking of him."

"I am thinking of you, Julien."

"But you haven't forgotten him."

"I could not forget anyone who had done me good, even if he ceased to exist. Don't reproach me, you who have done me so much more good!"

Julien was honest enough to respect Annette's frankness, and in his heart he felt her nobility. This for him was an unaccountable spectacle, the unwonted dignity of which revealed to him a new world—the new woman. But another part of his nature was in revolt. His masculine instincts were wounded. His Catholic and bourgeois prejudices were horrified. The idea that he had, that he continued to have, of Annette was poisoned with degrading suspicions. Instead of being surer of a woman who gave up her secret to him with complete loyalty, he was less sure of a woman whose past weakness had been revealed to him. He doubted her fidelity in the future. He thought of that other living man who had possessed her and whose child would be his. He was afraid of being deceived, he was afraid of being ridiculous. He was mortified, and he could not forgive her.

As soon as Annette fully perceived the dangerous struggle that was going on in Julien's mind and saw that the hope she had formed was menaced, she trembled. She was utterly in the grip of the love she had provoked. All her power of loving, all her capacity for happiness, she had centred in this Julien. And in truth she had half deceived herself. But she had only half deceived herself. Julien was not unworthy of her; his qualities were real; they deserved love. Different as they were, they would be able to live together with a little mutual effort to understand and tolerate each other—and a little suffering, no doubt; and was a little suffering too much to pay for a firm affection? Annette would have been good for him; she would have invigorated him; she would have been

that great wind of confidence in life that would have swelled his sails and carried him whither he could never have gone without her. And Julien's delicate tenderness, his respect for woman, his moral purity, even that candid religious faith which Annette did not share, would have been wholesome for her; they would have given her passionate nature a basis of security, the peace of home and of a soul of which one is sure.

Ah, the misery of hearts that miss their destiny through a misapprehension which their passion exaggerates, that know it and reproach themselves for it and always will reproach themselves, but will never yield the point that separates them just because they love too much to make a moral concession to which they would disdainfully consent with those to whom they are indifferent!

Annette tormented herself now with the anxieties to which she had given birth in Julien's mind. Was Julien right? . . . She was not infatuated with her own judgment. She tried to understand other ways of judging. Her character was not entirely formed: her moral instinct was strong, but her ideas were not yet established; she reserved the right to revise them. While quite young she had realized how artificial was the morality of those who surrounded her, and she had found nothing upon which to lean, nothing but her reason, which had often deceived her. She was always seeking; she sought for other ways of thinking in which she might breathe freely. And when she encountered a sincere conscience like Julien's she scrutinized it eagerly: would this voice respond to the appeal of her heart? She aspired to believe, this woman in revolt! She was seeking, seeking for her moral homeland. . . . How she would have loved to enter Julien's, to subscribe to its laws, even if they condemned her! But

it was not enough to long. She could not do it. What Julien desired simply wasn't human!

"I realize," she said to him tenderly, "that you are judging me as the world judges. I don't reproach you. I admire the rigorous, preservative force of its laws. They have their place in the sum of things and I know that their roots are deep in your family. It is natural for you to obey them. I respect them in you. But, my friend, all the efforts of my will could never make me deny an action, even if it is condemned by everyone, which has given me my child. Dear Julien, how could I deny what is my only consolation, the purest joy perhaps that heaven will grant me in my whole life? Don't try to blight it, but if you love me share my happiness! There is nothing in it that can injure you!"

She knew, even as she spoke, that he did not understand; she only irritated him the more. And she was broken-hearted. But what could she do? Lie to him? It was too dreadful that she had even thought of this humiliating resource. But could she allow the breach to grow wider in this affection that was so dear to her? It was as if this breach had extended to her heart. . . . She was in mortal terror every time she found herself in Julien's presence. What was he going to read today in her face?

As for him, he abused her love with all the baseness of a man who is certain that he is loved. He knew that he was hurting her and he went on hurting her. He in turn felt his power, and he began to desire her less now he was sure that she desired him.

She understood it all! She was in despair because she had betrayed her weakness. But she went on. She abandoned herself to a superstitious feeling: if fate intended

her to be Julien's wife, she would be, whatever she said; whatever she said, she would lose him if that was her fate.

But secretly she wished to believe that, in exchange for her submission, fate would be favorable to her. Julien would be touched.

"I put myself in your hands. Will you love me the less for that?"

XXI

A strange travail was going on in Julien's mind. He loved her—no, he desired her—as much as always. Who could say which it was? (He did not want to know.) . . . In short, he still wanted her. But he was sure now, not only that his mother would never consent to his marriage, but that he himself would never be able to make up his mind to it. For many reasons: bitterness, wounded vanity, moral disapproval, what might be called a jealous repulsion. But he preferred not to dwell on these reasons. "Yes, we know you, but don't show yourselves." His mind arranged expedients to satisfy at once his hidden reasons and his desires. . . . Annette, in the past, had declared herself a free woman in love. He did not approve of this, no; but, after all, since she was as she was, why should she not be just this with him whom she loved?

He did not put it to her as bluntly as this. He pleaded all the things that made marriage impossible (he brought forth new ones as fast as she refuted them): the insurmountable obstacles, his mother's opposition, the necessity of living with his mother, his financial straits, with Annette accustomed to wealth, to society—poor Annette, reduced for two years to giving private lessons!—the differ-

ence in their minds and temperaments. . . . (This last argument came up just at the end, to the dismay and terror of Annette, when she believed she had surmounted the others.) With obstinate unfairness, Julien depreciated himself, the better to mark the difference between them. It was enough to make one laugh and weep. It was pitiable to see him looking for all these poor pretexts for escaping, while she, forgetting her pride, pretended not to understand, wore herself out finding replies, struggled feverishly to keep him from leaving her.

He was not leaving her. He did not refuse to take. He refused to give.

When Annette perceived the object of all these barricades and what he wanted of her, she had a feeling less of revolt than of prostration. She did not have enough strength left to be indignant. To struggle was no longer worth the trouble. That was what he wanted! . . . He! . . . Wretched soul! . . . So he didn't know himself? So he didn't realize how he appeared in her eyes? If he had been loved it was just because of his solid integrity. It wasn't at all, not at all, becoming for him to play the Don Juan, the libertine, the free lover! (For, in spite of her grief, Annette's mind kept its ironical clearness, and it never failed to seize the comic that was mingled with the tragic in life.)

"My friend," she thought, tenderly, pityingly, disgustedly, "I loved you better when you condemned me. Your rather narrow but lofty idea of love gave you the right to do so. But now you no longer have that right. What have I to do with this inferior love you are proposing to me today, this love without trust? If trust is lacking there is nothing left between us."

Every love has its essence: where one blossoms, an-

other withers. Carnal love dispenses with respect. The love that is based on respect cannot lower itself to simple enjoyment.

"Why," cried Annette in her heart, which was rising in revolt, "I would rather be the mistress of the first passer-by who pleased me than of you, you whom I love!"

For with him it would be degrading. Everything or nothing!

To Julien's suggestions she thus opposed a firm, affectionate refusal that hurt him. They continued to love one another, while judging each other severely; and neither of them could resign himself to the loss of their happiness. There they were, appealing to each other, desiring each other, even offering themselves—incapable as they were of pronouncing the word that would bring them together—the one through inner weakness, that moral debility which with rare exceptions (if a man can dare to say it) belongs to man, and which he does not recognize, the other through that deep-seated pride which belongs to woman and which she does not confess either: for the two sexes have been so deformed by the moral conventions of a society built upon the victory of man that they have both forgotten their real character. The weaker of the two is not always by nature the one who calls himself so. The woman is richer in the energies of the earth, and if she is caught in the snare that man has thrown over her she remains a captive who has not surrendered.

Julien dimly perceived the justice of Annette's motives, and he did not question their honesty, but he could not do violence to the timidity of his own heart. He followed the opinion of the world, which he respected less than Annette. By himself he would have accepted Annette's past, but he could not accept it under the eye of

the world; and he persuaded himself that this was the eye of his own conscience. He did not have the courage to take for a wife this woman whom he desired; and his pusillanimity he called dignity. He was not able to delude himself completely; and he was angry with Annette because he had not been able to delude her either. He ought to have broken with her, but he would not consent to this. And when Annette spoke of leaving him he held her back, hesitated, suffered, caused her suffering. He was no more willing to accept her than to give her up. He played the cruel game of keeping up her hope, which he later killed. He shunned her when she was most loving and was most loving when she resigned herself. Annette went through painful crises of wounded affection. She ate her heart out. Sylvie saw this and finally extorted the truth from her. She had seen Julien and she had made up her mind about him. "He is one of those people," she said, "who never make a decision till they are forced to do so. You can do it; make him consent. He will be grateful to you later."

But Annette had suffered too much from the thought that Julien might reproach her some day (even if he never expressed it) if she married him. When it was no longer possible to ignore the irremediable weakness of his character and the futile hope of a lasting decision from which his troubled spirit would no longer try to draw back, she settled the question in good earnest. She wrote to Julien and told him not to prolong this useless torment any further. She was suffering, he was suffering, and they had to live. She had to work for her child, and he had his own work. She had taken him away from it too long. They had both been using up their strength, and they had none too much of it. Since they could not do each other

the good they had hoped for, let them not do each other harm. They must not see each other any more. She thanked him for all that he had been to her.

Julien did not answer. Silence fell between them. But in their hearts, bitterness, regret, wounded passion still fought with one another.

XXII

Their love had not remained a secret from those who were close to them. Leopold had watched it with an annoyance he had not been able to conceal from Sylvie. His painful memory of that far from brilliant adventure of his had left in his mind an involuntary resentment which had not become less active a few months later. Far from it. For he found it possible to pretend to himself that he had forgotten the reason for it. Sylvie, already on the watch, was struck by his strange behavior: she observed him and she found it impossible to doubt that he was jealous. In accordance with the admirable logic of the heart, she was angry with Annette. She took a violent dislike to her. In a measure the state of her health explained these violent reactions. But the unfortunate thing in such cases is that the reverberation is prolonged beyond the condition that has caused them.

In October Sylvie gave birth to a little girl. Joy for everybody. Annette became as passionately attached to the child as if it had been her own. It gave Sylvie no pleasure to see it in her arms, and she no longer tried to conceal the hostility that she had hitherto repressed. Annette, who, for a few weeks, had been listening to unkind words from her sister, which she attributed to the

passing illness, was no longer able to doubt Sylvie's estrangement. She said nothing, avoiding any occasion for annoying her. She hoped for a return of the old affection.

Sylvie was on her feet again. The relations between the two sisters remained apparently the same, and an outsider would not have noticed any change. But Annette observed in Sylvie a cold animosity that hurt her. She would have liked to take her hands and ask her, "What's the matter? What have you against me? Tell me, dear!"

But Sylvie's look froze her. She did not dare. She felt intuitively that if Sylvie spoke she would say something irreparable. It was much better to remain silent. Annette felt in her sister a wish to be unjust against which she could do nothing.

One day Sylvie said to Annette that she wanted to have a talk with her. Annette, with her heart beating, wondered, "What is she going to say to me?"

Sylvie said nothing that could offend Annette, not a word of her grievances. She talked to her about getting married.

Annette gently changed the subject. But Sylvie was insistent and suggested a match: a friend of Leopold, a sort of business agent, a journalist in some vague way, with a certain style, the manners of a man of the world, and varied, too varied, resources, who sold automobiles and wrote advertisements, acted as an intermediary between the manufacturers and their customers in clubs and drawing-rooms, and received commissions from both sides. It was a proof that Sylvie had changed greatly in relation to her sister that she could offer her such a choice, and Annette was aware of the lack of affection this deliberate

slight indicated. With a gesture she stopped the description of the candidate. Sylvie took it in bad part, asking if Annette found the suggested suitor beneath her pretensions. Annette said that she had no pretensions except to live alone. Sylvie replied that this was easy to say, that it was all very well to want to live alone, but that first one had to have the power to do so.

"But do you think I can't?"

"You? I challenge you to do it!"

"You are unjust. I can earn my living."

"With the help of other people."

In the tone, even more than in the words, there was something intentionally wounding. Annette blushed, but she did not take her up; she did not want to bring about an open quarrel.

During the following weeks, Sylvie's ill-humor was very noticeable. Any pretext served her, the least disagreement in conversation, a detail in dress, Annette's lateness at dinner, the noise little Marc made on the stairs. They never went out together any more. If they had arranged for a walk on Sunday, she set out with Leopold, without saying anything to Annette, using the latter's unpunctuality as an excuse. Or at the last moment she would call off the party they had planned.

Annette saw that her presence was a burden. She spoke timidly of looking for an apartment in some other quarter that would be less remote from her pupils. She hoped they would protest, beg her to remain. They pretended not to have heard her.

She was cowardly; she stayed on. She clung to this affection which she felt was escaping her. It was not only Sylvie whom she did not want to leave. She was attached to little Odette. She endured more than one painful

affront without seeming to notice it. She lengthened the intervals between her visits.

Even so, they were too frequent for Sylvie. She certainly had not returned to her normal state. An unwholesome jealousy was working in her. Once when Annette was innocently playing with Odette, without noticing a dry warning that Sylvie had given her to stop, the latter rose, irritated, and snatched the little girl from her arms. "Go away!" she said.

There was such animosity in her eyes that Annette, struck by it, said to her, "But what have I done? Don't look at me that way! I can't bear it. Do you want me to go away? Do you want me not to come back any more?"

"At last you understand," said Sylvie, cruelly.

Annette turned pale. "Sylvie!" she cried.

With a cold rage, Sylvie went on: "You are living at my expense. Very well. That's all right. But that's enough. My husband and my daughter are mine. Hands off!"

Annette, with white lips, repeated, in an agonized tone, "Sylvie, Sylvie!"

Then suddenly a transport seized her too. "You wicked thing!" she cried. "You will never see me again!"

She ran to the door and went out.

Ashamed of her violence, Sylvie pretended to laugh.

"We shall see her again this evening."

SUMMER

PART TWO

XXIII

NNETTE left Sylvie's apartment intending never to enter it again. She was weeping. She was burning with shame and rage. These two passionate natures could not cease to love each other without almost hating each other.

Impossible for Annette to remain under the same roof with her! If she had had the means she would have moved the next day. Happily for her, she had to yield to practical necessities: to give notice, to look for another apartment. In her first fury she would have preferred to place her furniture in storage and camp out in a hotel. But this was not the moment to squander her money. She had very little laid aside; what she earned was spent as she went along; even when she had no recourse to her sister's aid, the feeling that she could appeal to her in case of need gave her a security that spared her any too keen anxieties over the future. When she came to reckon up what she must have in order to live, she was obliged to recognize, to her mortification, that if she were thrown upon her own resources her actual work would not suffice to support her. Living with her sister and taking some of their meals together lightened her expenses. The child's clothes were given him by Sylvie, and Annette paid only for the material of her own dresses. And this was not to mention the things she borrowed or those which, while they belonged to one, served for two, the small gifts, the Sunday excursions, the little extra pleasures that bright-

ened the daily monotony. And then the credit which her sister enjoyed in the neighborhood gave Annette the benefit of a certain latitude in paying her bills. Now she would have to count upon paying cash for everything. The beginning would be hard. The moving, the deposit, the expenses of settling. And the great question, who was going to look after the child? A contradictory question: for she had to earn money for the child, and in order to earn it she had to leave home, and who would take care of him? Annette had to admit that she would never have surmounted these difficulties if they had come earlier, when Marc was very young. How did other women manage? Annette was sorry for the unhappy souls, and she felt humiliated.

Place the child in a boarding-school? He was old enough to go to school now. But she was unwilling to shut him up in one of those menageries. What she had heard about those old-time institutions (things have been somewhat improved since then), what she instinctively surmised about this physical and moral promiscuity, had led her to regard it as a crime to put one's child into them. She wanted to believe that the boy would be unhappy there. Who could say? Perhaps he would have been very glad to get away from her. But what mother can believe that she is a burden to her child? She was not even willing to leave him at one of these schools for his meals. She told herself that this was because of Marc's delicate health; he needed special food; she had to watch over his diet. But it was extremely fatiguing to come home from lunch when her lessons obliged her sometimes to run to the other end of Paris. Going, coming, always in movement. And the lessons did not bring in enough money. Some urgent expense was always turning

up upon which she had not reckoned. The boy was growing very large, and Annette regretted that he was not like those little beans which never grow faster than their shells. She had to clothe him. Nor could she permit herself to neglect her own appearance; her occupation would have prevented this if her pride had not done so. So she had to find new resources. Copying to be done at home, the work of some foreigner or a translation to be revised (an ungrateful task, poorly remunerated); secretarial work, one or two mornings in the week (also poorly remunerated); but all these things, taken together, were enough. To earn money by any means! Annette did many things at once. She made herself hated by the hungry rivals whom she thrust out of her way in her pursuit of bread. But this time the devil could take the hindmost. No more sentimentality! She had no time for it. You cannot go back and pick up those who have fallen. It was true that she sometimes had the vision in passing of some strained face that stared at her with hostile eyes, some evicted competitor whom she would gladly have helped in other days. A pity, but she did not have the time. She had to get there first. She knew now where to find work, and she knew the shortest way to it. Her diplomas, her degree, gave her an assured superiority. And she was not unaware that she had advantages on another side, the personal side, her eyes, her voice, her way of dressing, her skill in handling her clients. Between her and other applicants they rarely hesitated. Those that were sacrificed could not forgive her.

Her new life was established on a healthily rigorous system. No empty room for useless thoughts. From one day to another, every day was as full as a nut, full and hard. After the trepidation of the first weeks, when she

did not know whether she could manage to live and keep her child alive, she became used to it, she grew more confident, she even ended by finding pleasure in the difficulties she had overcome. No doubt, in the rare moments when the necessity of acting no longer held her mind tense, when at night she laid her head on her pillow, there were times before she went to sleep when her accounts, the thought of her budget, weighed upon her. . . . If she dropped on the road? . . . If she fell ill? . . . I won't. . . . Peace, I must sleep. . . . Happily, she was tired; sleep did not keep her waiting And when the day returned, there was no longer room for those "ifs" and apprehensions. No more room for that which enervated, enfeebled, broke the soul. Penury and toil put everything in its proper place—that which belonged to the necessary and that which belonged to luxury.

The necessary: daily bread. Luxury: the problems of the heart. . . . Could she have imagined it? These problems seemed to her now of secondary importance. All very well for those who have too much time on their hands! She had neither too much nor too little. Just enough. One thought for each thing she did, and not one to spare. So, full of strength, she felt like a well-trimmed ship that is launched on the waves.

She was in her thirty-third year, and nothing had yet wasted her energies. She perceived that she not only did not need protection but that she was stronger without it. The difficulty of her life invigorated her. And its first benefit was in liberating her from the obsession of Julien, from the nostalgia of love, which, dull or violent, had poisoned all her past years. She realized how satiated she was with sentimental dreams, sweet things, tender things, hypocritical sensuality; merely to think of them was re-

pugnant to her. To be occupied with the rough facts of life, to undergo its wounding contact, to be obliged to be hard herself—that was good, it was vivifying. A whole part of herself, the best part perhaps, certainly the healthiest, was born again.

She no longer dreamed. She no longer tormented herself, even about her child's health. When he was ill she did what had to be done. She did not think about it beforehand. She no longer thought about it, indefinitely, afterwards. She was ready for everything, she was confident. And that was the best medicine. During these first years of desperate toil she was not ill a single day, and the child caused her no real anxiety.

Her intellectual life was no less curtailed than her emotional life. She scarcely had time to read any longer. She might have suffered from this, but she did not. Her mind made up the deficiency from its own resources. She had enough to do to sort and arrange her new discoveries. For during these first months she discovered a great deal; she discovered everything. And yet in what respect had things changed? As for work, she had been very familiar with that—or she had thought she was familiar with it. And this city, these people were just the same to-day as yesterday.

Between one day and the next, however, everything had changed. From the moment she had begun to seek her bread she had made the real discovery. It had not been love, not even maternity. She carried these things within her, but her life had expressed only a small portion of herself. Hardly had she passed into the camp of poverty, however, than she discovered the world.

The world varies, according as one considers it from above or from below. Annette was in the street now, be-

tween the rows of houses that stretched away on both sides: she saw the asphalt, the mud, the menace of the motor-cars and the flood of passers-by. She saw the sky above (rarely luminous)—when she had the time! The space between vanished: all that had formed the object of her life hitherto, society, conversation, theatres, books, the luxury of pleasure and the intelligence. She knew very well that they were there and she might have enjoyed them, but she had other things to think about. Watching her steps, looking out for herself, hurrying. . . . How all these people ran! . . . From above one saw nothing but the meandering of the river: it seemed calm, and one did not notice the strength of the current. The race, the race for bread. . . .

A thousand times Annette had thought of the state in which she found herself to-day, in the world of toil and poverty. But what she had thought then bore no resemblance to what she thought now that she was taking part in it.

Yesterday she had believed in the democratic axiom of the Rights of Man, and it had seemed to her unjust that the masses should be deprived of them. To-day, the injustice—if there remained any question of just and unjust—was that rights existed for the privileged. There are no rights. Man has no right to anything. Nothing belongs to him. He has to conquer everything anew every day. That is the Law: "Thou shalt earn thy bread in the sweat of thy brow." Rights are the deceitful invention of a fallen combatant, to sanction the spoils of his past victory. Rights are nothing but the strength of yesterday, heaping up its treasures. But the living right, the only one, is work. The conquest of every day. . . . What a sudden vision of the human battlefield! It had

no terrors for Annette. The courageous soul accepted this combat as a necessity; and she found it just because she was "in form," young and robust. If she conquered, so much the better! If she was conquered, so much the worse! (She would not be conquered. . . .) She had not given up pity, but she had given up weakness. The first of her duties was "Don't be pusillanimous!"

By the new light of this law of labor, everything became clear to her. The old faiths were put to the test, and a new morality rose on the ruins of the old, cemented on this heroic foundation. The morality of freedom, the morality of strength, not of Pharisaism and debility. And examining under this light the doubts that troubled her, especially that which lay deepest in her heart, "Have I the right to my child?" she answered, "Yes, if I can keep him alive, if I can make a man of him. If I can do this, everything will be all right. If I cannot, everything will be wrong. This is the only morality; everything else is hypocritical."

This inflexible decision redoubled her vigor and her joy in the struggle.

She was meditating in this fashion one day as she was walking about Paris, going from one task to another. The walking excited her mind. Now that her daily activity was methodically regulated, her dreams resumed their rights. But they were waking dreams, clear, precise, dreams that had nothing misty about them. The more limited her time was, the more she made of these slight intervals; like ivy the hours climbed up, covering the walls of the days. Annette brought her enlarged conceptions of the true human morality face to face with the experiences of her day. Work and poverty had opened her eyes. She had a new perception of the untruthfulness

of modern life which she had not seen when she was caught in it. The monstrous futility of this life—nine-tenths of this life—particularly for women. . . . Eating, sleeping, procreating. . . . Yes, a tenth part had some use. But the rest? . . . This "civilization"? What people call "thinking"? Is man—*vulgus umbrarum*—really made for thought? He wants to persuade himself that he is, he puts himself into the attitude for it, and he believes that he holds it, as by consecrated exploits. But he does not think. He does not think over his newspaper, or in his office, before the wheel on which his everyday activities revolve. The wheel turns with him, turns empty. Did they think, those young girls whom Annette had undertaken to teach? What was the meaning of the words they heard, read, uttered? To what did their life reduce itself? A few immense, depressing instincts brooding in their torpor under a mass of playthings. Desire and enjoyment. . . . Thought was also one of their playthings. Who was deceived by it? Themselves. The garment of this civilization, its luxury, its art, its movement and its noise—(that noise! one of its masks, to make itself believe that it was hurrying toward some end! what end? It hurried in order to stupefy itself)—what lay beneath it? Emptiness. People gloried in it. They gloried in their tinsel, in their chatter, in their trinkets. How rare were the men who revealed the shining light of Necessity! To the eternal brute in man the voice of its gods and its sages says nothing or is only one triviality the more. It never escapes from the confines of its desire and boredom. Like man himself, human society is a meretricious structure. Custom holds it together. A touch can lay it in ruins. . . .

Tragic thoughts. But they could not depress the ardent Annette. It is the inspiration within that gives joy or sadness, not ideas. Under an untroubled sky an anæmic soul perishes of melancholy. A vigorous soul, exposed to storms, wraps itself as happily in shadows as in sunlight. It knows quite well that they alternate. Annette came home sometimes crushed with fatigue and the feeling of a dark future. She would go to bed and sleep; in the middle of the night some ridiculous dream would wake her up laughing. Or, more often, in the evening, as she sat with her brow bent over her work and the fingers followed their path, her brain, following its path in turn, would suddenly pick up some absurd thought and she would be full of merriment. She had to take care not to laugh too loudly in order not to awaken Marc. "I'm an idiot," she said, as she dried her eyes. But her heart was lightened. These childish relaxings, these sudden reactions, were a wholesome heritage that came to her from her family. When the heart is full of clouds, the wind of joy rises and drives them away.

No, she had no need of distractions, books. Annette had enough to read in herself. And the most thrilling of books was her son.

XXIV

He was approaching his seventh year. He had adjusted himself to the change of his surroundings much more readily than might have been expected. Disagreeable or not, it was a change. He had cast his skin like a little snake. Ungrateful childhood! All Sylvie's indulgences

and all her petting—she was so certain of her power over him!—were as if they had never been. After forty-eight hours he no longer even thought of them.

What pleases or displeases a child is never what you expect. The first thing Marc appreciated in his new life was the school whither his mother sent him pityingly—and the hours of solitude when there was nobody to watch him.

Annette had established herself in a little apartment on the fifth floor on the populous Rue Monge. A steep stairway, small rooms, noise from without; but there was space above the roofs, and she needed this. The noise did not disturb her; she was a Parisian, accustomed to movement; it was almost necessary to her; she could think all the better in the midst of the hurly-burly. Perhaps her nature had also been transformed with maturity: the plenitude of physical life and regular work had given her a poise, a nervous solidity, which she had never known, but which would not endure forever.

The apartment consisted, on the street side, of Annette's bedroom, which served as a sitting-room (the bed formed a divan), Marc's little room, and a narrow recess, a sort of corner-closet. Across the passage, which was dark at midday, was the dining-room over the court and a kitchen that was practically filled by the stove and the sink.

Between the mother's room and that of the child the door remained open, and Marc was too small to protest. He was at the undecided age that floats between the sexlessness of early infancy and the first uncertain awakening of the little man. He was no longer in the one stage and not yet in the other. He would still run from his own bed to his mother's on Sunday morning; and on

great days he would allow her to dress him from head to foot. On other days he would have fits of rudeness and shyness. And he was full of curiosity also. Especially he had attacks of secretiveness which he did not wish to have disturbed. He would slyly shut his door. Annette would open it again. He could not make a movement that she did not hear. It was unbearable! So he wouldn't move at all. Then she would forget him for a little while. Not for long! . . .

Happily, Annette was not always there. She had to go out. Marc went to his school, which was not far away. Annette took him there in the morning, and when she was free (rarely) in the afternoon. But she could not come for him to take him home again, for this was the hour of her lessons. He had to come home alone, and this made her anxious. She had tried to arrange with a neighboring family for the servant to bring Marc home when she brought their child. But this did not suit Marc, and he slipped away beforehand. So, proud and timorous, he would come back alone and all alone shut himself up in the apartment. Good times till his mother's return! Annette scolded him for his independence. But although she would never have admitted to herself that she had this evil feeling, she was not too sorry that he should be able to get along without comrades. She distrusted comrades. She did not want anyone to spoil her son. . . . *Her* son! Was she quite sure that he was hers? Of course she made an effort to repress her egotistical love. No longer, as in the days when he was very small, did she feel the blind, gluttonous need of absorbing the little being in her passion. She saw in him now a personality. But she persuaded herself that she had the key of this personality, that she knew better than he

its laws and its happiness; she wanted to carve it in the image of her secret God. Believing, like most mothers, that she was incapable of creating what she desired herself, she dreamed of creating it through him who had sprung from her blood. (That eternal dream, eternally frustrated, of Wotan!)

But in order to shape him, she had to catch him. Not let him escape! She did everything to envelop him. Too much. Every day he escaped more. She had the discouraging impression that every day she knew him less. One thing she knew well: his body, his physical health, his illnesses, the least symptoms. She had an intuition that never deceived her. She would hold him before her, bathe him, touch him, care for him . . . this dear fragile body of the little hermaphrodite. He looked transparent. But what was inside him? She devoured him with her eyes and her hands; he was entirely at her mercy.

"Heavens, how I love you, little monster! And do you love me?"

"Yes, Mamma," he replied politely.

But what was he thinking in his heart?

At seven Marc had scarcely a feature of his family. In vain had Annette explored him, sought for some resemblance, tried to imagine one. . . . No, he was not like her, either in the shape of his forehead, or in his eyes, or in that swelling of the lips, so characteristic of the Rivières, and especially of Annette, as if the will, the inner ardor, had expanded them. The only point in common was the color of the iris, and this was lost in a strange world. . . . What world? . . . The father's? The Brissots'? Scarcely. At least, not yet. Jealously Annette said, "Never!"

And yet would she have been so displeased to find some

trace of Roger in her son's features? Would it not have given her an obscure pleasure? She remembered the man to whom she had given herself with a mixture of bitterness and unconfessed attraction—an attraction less for the real Roger than for him of whom she had dreamed. In fact, it was to this dream that she had given herself. If she had seen him again in the image of her son, she would have had a strange feeling of victory, the feeling that she had wrested from him this form she loved in order to animate it with her own soul. Yes, as long as Marc's spirit was like her own, she would have been glad to find Roger's features in him.

But he resembled neither Roger nor herself. Roger's face, which lacked the original expression of the Rivières, had a simple, regular beauty of line: it was an easy book to read. But this child's face, the meaning of this expression . . . how describe it? It was so fleeting. . . .

Pretty, delicate features, but not well proportioned, the narrow brow, the effeminate chin, eyes a little aslant, the nose—whose did it resemble, this long, tapering, finely arched nose?—and the wide, thin mouth with pale, slightly crooked lips? . . . Even when he was motionless he seemed to be moving; his air was uncertain and changing. . . . No doubt he was seeking for his form: he was still fluctuating, but in what direction would he decide to go? Or would he decide not to have any direction?

Since his serious illness, he had been a child who at a first glance would have been called nervous and impressionable (as perhaps he was). But as you watched him, he disconcerted you with his calm ways, his air of indifference, his reserved expression. Not disagreeable, not sulky, not saying no. . . . "Yes, Mamma." . . . But

you saw at once that he was not paying any attention to what you said. He had not heard it. . . . Or had he heard it? It was hard to be sure. . . . And he looked at his mother to see what was going to happen next, and she looked at him. . . . The little sphinx! . . . All the more a sphinx because he didn't know that he was one. He knew no more about himself than Annette knew about him, though this was the last thing to cause him any anxiety. When you are seven you have ceased trying to understand yourself and have not yet begun to do so again. On the other hand, he was trying to understand her, his mistress and servant. And he had the time for this because she shut him up with herself for days together. They observed one another mutually. But she was no match for him.

Annette deceived herself in thinking that he did not resemble any one she knew. There were astonishing similarities between his spirit and that of his grandfather Rivière. But Annette, though this occurred to her, had known very little about her father. He had charmed her so much that she had never seen the real Raoul Rivière. She had merely had a few suspicions, especially since she had read the famous correspondence. She had not wanted to dwell on this. Even if she had to bolster them up, she preferred to keep the pious and tender memories that had been momentarily shaken. Besides, she had only known the Raoul of the last phase. But if old Rivière had been able to return and inspect the little love-child, as he would have known so well how to do, he would have said, "I am beginning again."

He was not beginning again. Nothing ever begins again. He had merely come back in certain details.

What mischievous tricks blood plays! Over Annette's

head the two confederates shook hands. And one of the most striking traits which the frank Annette had transmitted from the grandfather to the grandchild was a remarkable aptitude for dissembling. Not through any need to deceive. Raoul Rivière had enough good-natured contempt for his contemporaries and felt strong enough never to have any fear of showing himself, when it pleased him, quite without disguise. (It had often pleased him, and people would quote ferocious words of his that carried all before them.) No, this was a gratuitous pleasure, a delight in the burlesque, a theatrical tendency, a malicious taste for concealing his moral identity in order to mystify people. The child, innocently of course, had inherited this. His soul, which was still full of inconsistencies and very heterogeneous, with nothing of the buffoon in its depths, had slipped at birth into this malicious attitude, and it used the organs that Nature had made for it. Just as it would have tried its beak, its claws or its wings if it had passed into the body of a woolly or feathered animal, so, enveloped as it were in a fold of one of old Rivière's coats, it revealed once more the wiles of the grandfather.

Marc was guarded in the presence of grown-ups, and he could read in them everything that concerned him. On that side his faculty of attention was keen. When he saw what they imagined he was, he became it—at least unless they irritated him or he wanted to amuse himself and was seized with the whim of being contrary.

One of his occupations was to take apart the mechanism of these living playthings, look for their hidden springs, their weak points, try them, play with them, make them go. This was not very difficult, for they were stupid and unsuspicious. And first of all, his mother.

She puzzled him. There was something enigmatic about her. He had heard allusions to this subject in Sylvie's workshop, when he was sitting under the feet of the working-girls, who were not thinking of him. He did not understand much of it. But this added to the mystery, and he interpreted it. Divining, discovering. In this alert little ferret-like body, motionless, with shining eyes, the mind was always working.

Now that he was shut up with her, often for days, because of his ill-health, his winter colds and the greedy affection of his mother, she was his principal resource. He watched her curiously while he sang to himself, moving about, pursuing his other occupations—for a child's intelligence, like its body, is lithe and hard to hold. No matter if he is facing the other way, he sees you with eyes in the back of his head, and his cat's ears turn like weathercocks at the sound of your voice. If this all-observing attention chases three or four hares at a time, it never loses the trail, it amuses itself, it knows very well that tomorrow it will begin again. . . . The hare allowed herself to be caught. Expansive, easily carried away, prodigal in her feelings, Annette was never niggardly. She spent herself without calculation.

At one moment she spoke to him as to a very little child, and she hurt his feelings: he thought her ridiculous. Again she would speak to him as to a companion of her thoughts, too old for his age, and she wearied him: he thought her a bore. Sometimes she let herself think out loud, carried on a monologue before him, as if he could understand it. Then he thought her queer, and he watched her with a severe, mocking look. He did not understand her; but people who do not understand never surrender their right to judge.

He had adopted an artificial attitude that was convenient for him because he could apply it to all cases: the impertinent, absent-minded politeness of a well-brought-up child who appears to listen because he must, but who is not in the least interested in all these things, who has his own concerns and, when you speak to him, waits till you have finished. At other times he amused himself playing at kissing her so as to give her pleasure. He knew that his mother was nearly bursting with happiness. The foolish woman responded with all her heart. When she fell into his snares, he had a sort of affectionate contempt for her. When she busied herself in a way that he had not foreseen, he was annoyed, but he had more respect for her.

He was incapable of playing one part very long. A child is too yielding and is always jumping from one thing to another. A moment after he had pretended to be so warm-hearted and had enchanted her with his effusions, he unblushingly betrayed his indifference in the harshest way. Annette was completely upset.

There came a time when she ceased to be deceived or provoked any longer, especially at the rare moments when a vague suspicion warned her that Marc was obstinately posing. Then, nervously and violently—we ask modern pedagogues to forgive us—she spanked him. Truly she was going against all good principles and affronting the dignity of her child! From the point of view of an Anglo-Saxon, poor Annette dishonored herself forever. But we old French people don't go quite so far as that. *Qui bene amat.* . . . The maxim still flourishes in bourgeois families that have preserved some tincture of Latin. We have all been "well loved." And at bottom we believe, three-quarters of the time, like Annette's boy, that

we are getting more than our deserts. But it is also true that if, like him, we continue to love those who spank us, the spanking results in their losing a little of their prestige. Let us admit that perhaps it is for this reason that we—Marc and we—provoke them!

He had a fine time afterwards playing the part of the outraged victim. And Annette reproached herself for abusing her power. She felt that she was at fault. She would try to find a way back into his good graces. He would wait for her to come to him. . . .

The triumph of weakness! It is a weapon that women are expert in handling. But the most feminine of the two in this case was the child. This young morsel of flesh, still all bathed in the maternal milk, was more than half feminine, and it had all the wiles and tricks of a girl. Annette was disarmed. Beside the little rogue she was the strong sex. The stupid strong sex, which is ashamed of its strength and tries to win forgiveness for itself. The contest was not equal. The child made a fool of her.

XXV

But he was no artful comedian amusing himself. Like his grandfather, he had more than one nature. Very few had been able to see what lay hidden beneath the mocking mask of old Rivière, the drama concealed by that jesting cynicism, that appetite for play-acting which is sometimes characteristic of conquering spirits. Raoul had had his dark depths which he never revealed. They exist more often than one might suppose under the Gallic laugh. One keeps them to oneself. Annette, who had her own secrets, had never told them to her father, and his secrets

she had known no more than she knew those of her son. They all remained walled up in their own inner lives. A strange reserve. People blush less at exposing their vices and their appetites—Raoul had fairly paraded his—than the tragedy of the soul.

Of this latter Marc had his share. A child who lives alone, without brothers or companions, has time to wander about these caves of life. Very deep and vast were the caves of the Rivières. The mother and the child might have met in them. But they did not see each other; they passed very close to each other more than once, imagining that they were very far apart. Both of them, with eyes bandaged, Annette's by the demon of passion that still held her, the child by the egoism that was natural to his age—both were in the dark. But Marc as yet was only at the entrance of the cavern; he was not, like Annette, seeking for the way out, bruising himself against the walls; he was crouching on one of the first steps, dreaming of the future. Incapable of explaining it to himself, he was building his life.

He had not had to go far to find the redoubtable wall before which the terrified ego recoils. Death. The wall rose on all sides. Illness skirted it like an encircling road. It was vain to seek for a passage through it. The wall was massive and had no breach. It had not been necessary for any one to tell Marc that the wall was there. Instantly, in the shadow, he had scented it, like a horse with his mane rising. He had spoken to no one about it. No one had spoken to him. The whole world was in agreement on the subject.

Annette, like the young women of today, was a bad teacher who, as a girl, had heard a great deal of talk about teaching, and was not unwilling to talk about it as a

matter of conscience. She attached more importance to the method of bringing up children than the mothers of former days who had gone about it blindly. But once the child was there, she had found herself helpless before the thousand and one surprises of life, incapable of playing her part, making up theories which she did not apply, or which she abandoned at the first attempt. In the end she had let them all go and fallen back upon instinct.

The religious problem was one of those that had troubled her, and she had not been able to reach any practical solution of it for the child. Most of the friends of her youth, in the rich, republican bourgeoisie, had been brought up with religion by their mothers, without religion by their fathers. They did not even feel the clash of the two conceptions. (The two get along together very well in the world, like many other contradictory facts, for neither feeling has a third dimension.) She herself had gone to church, as she had gone to school: she had taken her first communion, as she had taken her diploma, conscientiously, without emotion. The ceremonies at which she had been present in her wealthy parish seemed to her to belong to the order of the world. She had separated from them when she separated from the world.

Modern society—and the Church is one of its pillars—has succeeded so well in denaturing and weakening the great human forces that Annette, who bore within her a richer faith than that of a hundred devotees, imagined she was not religious. For she confounded religion with prayer-wheels and the ceremonies of an obsolete exoticism, a luxury of soul for the rich, a snare for the eyes and that consolation for the heart of the poor which assures the foundations of their poverty and of society.

Since she had given up her religious observances, she

had never felt the need for them. It did not occur to her that when she had her fiery transports of conscience, her passionate monologues, she was really saying mass.

She did not think of giving her son what she had gone without herself. Perhaps the question would not even have occurred to her if, paradoxically, Sylvie had not brought it up. Sylvie, who had no more religion than a Parisian sparrow, would not have considered herself married without the concurrence of the Church; and it seemed to her indecent that Annette should not have her son baptised. Annette had not thought of this. But she had it done so that Sylvie might be the godmother. Then she thought no more of the matter, and things remained where they were until Julien's arrival. That Julien had a practical faith did not give Annette one, but it rendered the faith worthy of respect in her eyes and brought her attention back to the problem she had neglected. What was she to do for Marc? Send him to church? Teach him a religion in which she did not believe? She asked Julien, who was scandalized; he affirmed emphatically that the child had to be instructed in the divine truths.

"But if they are not truths for me? Must I tell lies when Marc asks me questions?"

"No, don't tell lies, but allow him to believe. It's for his good."

"No, it couldn't be for his good for me to be dishonest. And what authority would I have when he found it out? Wouldn't he have the right to reproach me for it? He would not believe in me any longer. And how do I know whether this faith he would learn would not thwart his real development later?"

Here Julien's brow darkened, and Annette hastened to change the subject. But what was she to do? She

could not, as her Protestant friends advised, give her son a course in all the religions and leave him to choose for himself when he was sixteen years old. . . . Annette burst out laughing at this idea. What a strange conception of religion, as if it were a subject for an examination!

In the end Annette had done nothing. She walked about with Marc, went into churches, sat down in a corner, marvelled with him at the upspringing forest of these lofty trunks of stone, the underwood gleams that filtered through the stained-glass windows, enjoyed the flight of the vaults, the distant chanting, the vague accompaniment of the organ. It was a veritable bath of reverie and self-communion.

Marc did not dislike going about in this way, with his hand in his mother's, listening, whispering. It was sweet, it was warm, it was delightful. . . . Yes, if it didn't last too long. This sentimental somnolence bored him. He needed to move about and think of definite things. His little mind worked away, observed, noticed this crowd of praying people, watched his mother, who did not pray. And without expressing them he made his own reflexions. He asked few questions, much fewer than most children would have asked, for he was very proud and he was afraid of saying something naïve.

But he did ask, "Mother, who is God?"

"I don't know, my dear," she replied.

"Then what do you know?"

She smiled and pressed him against her. "I know that I love you."

Yes, the old story. He knew this, but it was not worth coming to church for.

He was not very sensitive and he had no taste for the

vague soulfulness in which "these women" delighted. Annette, when she had her child beside her, when she was without too many material cares, during an hour of relaxation earned amid the tasks that pursued her, was happy. She did not have to go very far to find God: he was in her heart. But Marc had found in his heart nothing but himself, Marc: everything else was mere foolishness. He had to be clear about things. Just what was this God? The man up there over the altar, with his girlish petticoat and his gilded shell? The verger with his staff and his exposed calves? Those painted-up images—one in each chapel—that grinned at you with their sickly smiles like embarrassed ladies whom he didn't like?

"Mamma, let's go on."

"But isn't this beautiful?"

"Yes, it's beautiful enough. Let's go home."

What was God? . . . He no longer insisted on asking his mother. When grown-ups confess that they do not know something, it is because they are not interested in it. . . . He continued his rather impatient inquiry alone. He heard prayers, "Our Father who art in heaven"—a localization that excited the scepticism of the more wide-awake of these modern cubs for whom heaven was on the point of becoming a new field of sport. He thumbed the Bible, along with other old stories, with a bored curiosity, asked a few questions, caught a few replies, here and there, with a negligent air—"God, some invisible person who created the world." That was what they said. It was too far off. And not clear. He was like his mother: God did not interest him. One king more or less. . . .

But what did interest him was his own existence, and what threatened it, and what was going to happen to it afterwards. Some dull conversations with Sylvie that

had taken place in his presence had very early aroused his attention. The shivering pleasure with which these girls spoke of accidents, sudden deaths, sicknesses, burials, chattering all the time! . . . Death excited them. The animal instinct of the child bristled at this word. He would have liked to question his mother about it. But Annette, who was very healthy, never spoke of death and never thought about it, at this period of her life. She had plenty of other things to do! Earning the little boy's living. When, from morning till evening, she had to think of the here and now, the beyond seemed a luxury. It only becomes essential when those one loves have passed to the other side. Her son was here. For the rest, if she lost him neither life nor death would have had any value for her. She was too passionate to be satisfied with an immaterial world, a world without a beloved body.

Marc saw her, vigorous, intrepid, busy, heedless of these fears; and he would have been ashamed to betray his weakness. So he was obliged to help himself alone. This was not easy. But, as one may suppose, the child did not embarrass himself with problems of complicated thought. He reduced the question to its proper dimensions. Death meant the disappearance of others. Let them disappear: that was their affair. But was it possible that he might disappear?

Once he overheard Sylvie say, "Oh, well, we're all going to die. . . ."

He asked, "I too?"

"Oh," she laughed, "you have time enough."

"How much?"

"Till you are old."

But he knew very well that they buried children too. Besides, even if he were old he would still be himself.

Some day Marc would die. . . . It was terrifying. Was there no possible means of escaping it? Somewhere he must find something like a nail in a wall, something he could cling to, a hand he could grasp. "I don't want to disappear."

The need of this hand might have led him to God, as it leads so many others, this outstretched hand that men in their anguish see projected into the night. But that his mother did not seem to be looking for this support was enough to drive away his thought. Even while criticising Annette, he felt the influence of her attitude. That in spite of what was awaiting her she could remain calm did not reassure him, but it obliged him to stand as straight as she did. No matter if he was a nervous, puny little boy, rather stubborn, he was not Annette's child for nothing. . . . Since she, a woman, is not afraid, I must not be afraid.

But it was not given to him, as it was given to these grown-ups, not to think about it. Thought comes and goes; you cannot keep it down, especially at night, when you cannot sleep. Well, then, he had to think of it and not be afraid: "What is it like to be dead?"

Naturally he had no means of knowing. Save for a few pictures in the museum, he had been spared every kind of funereal spectacle. Stiff in his little bed, he felt the walls of his body. How could he find out? An imprudent word revealed to him, quite close by, a window that opened on the abyss into which he burned to look.

One summer day he was dawdling by the window. He caught some flies and was pulling off their wings. It amused him to see them floundering about. It did not occur to him that he was doing them any harm; he was playing a game. They were living toys, and it made no

difference if he broke them. . . . His mother surprised him at this occupation. With the violence that she was unable to repress, she seized him by the shoulders and shook him, exclaiming that he was a disgusting little coward.

"What would you say if someone broke your arms? Don't you know that these creatures suffer just as you do?"

He pretended to laugh, but he was astounded by this. It had not occurred to him. These creatures were like him! He did not feel the least pity for them. But he looked at them now with other eyes, troubled, attentive, hostile. . . . A fallen horse in the street. . . . A howling dog that had been run over. . . . He watched. . . . The need of knowing was too strong for his pity to be awakened. . . .

At Easter, as the child, after a gray, damp winter that had been neither cold nor sunny, had suffered from a mild, but insidious, attack of influenza that had drained all the color from his cheeks, Annette rented for a fortnight a room in a farmhouse in the valley of Bièvres. It contained only one big bed for herself and the child. He did not like this very much: but she had not asked for his advice. Happily, he was alone during the day; Annette went back to Paris for her work, and she left him in the care of the landlady, who paid very little attention to him. Marc would quickly vanish into the fields. He looked around him, rummaged about, tried to grasp, from animals and things, some secret that concerned him; for everything in nature he related to himself. Wandering through the woods, he heard some boys making a noise in the distance. He was not looking for the company of other children; he was not strong enough, and he would have wanted to dominate them. But he was attracted just

the same. He approached and saw that there were four or five of them forming a circle about a wounded cat. The animal's back was broken, and the children were amusing themselves poking it, tormenting it, prodding it with the ends of their sticks. Without stopping to think, Marc threw himself into the group and struck about him with his fists. When the surprise was over, the band fell upon him shouting. He beat a retreat, but he remained a few steps away, hidden behind some bushes, and stopped his ears. He could not make up his mind to leave. . . . He returned. The young scoundrels hailed him with jeers, "Hello, skinny! Are you afraid? Come over here and see him croak!"

He came. He did not want to seem a milksop. Besides, he wanted to see. The animal, with its eyes glazed and half torn away, was lying on its side, its hindquarters rigid, already dead; its chest was panting and its head trying to lift itself while it moaned in distress. It could not die. The children were convulsed with laughter. Marc looked at it, petrified. Then suddenly he seized a stone and struck with it furiously at the creature's head. A raucous cry broke from him. He struck, struck harder, like a madman. He was still striking when all was over. . . .

The boys looked at him, embarrassed. One of them tried to make a joke. With blood on the fingers that were still grasping the stone, Marc, pale, with knitted brows, a wicked look in his eye and a trembling lip, stared at them. They went away. He heard them laughing and singing in the distance. Setting his teeth, he walked home, and once at home he said nothing about it. But at night, in bed, he cried. Annette took him into her arms. The soft body was trembling.

"What is this wicked dream? My angel, it's nothing."

He was thinking, "I killed it. I know what death is."

The terrifying pride of knowing, of having seen and destroyed! And another feeling, which he could not comprehend, a feeling of horror and attraction. . . . The strange bond that unites the slayer and the slain, the fingers daubed with blood and the broken head. . . . To which of the two did the blood belong? . . . The animal was no longer suffering. . . . He still felt its last agonies. . . .

Happily, at this age, the mind cannot cling very long to the same thought. It would have been dangerous if this had become a fixed idea. But other images passed and their current refreshed his brain. The idea remained, however, in the depths of him: its presence betrayed itself, from time to time, in sombre gleams, bubbles of air that slowly mounted from the mud of the brook. Under the soft crust of his nature a hard core was hidden: death, the force that kills. . . . I am killed and I kill. . . . I will not let myself be killed! Victory to the strongest! I shall fight!

Pride, an obscure pride that sustains its weakness, like a suit of armor. Whence did this steel come if not from his mother—the mother for whom he felt contempt nevertheless because of her effusiveness and because he wound her around his finger? He was not unaware of it. Even in the days when his preference had been all for Sylvie, who petted him, he had recognized Annette's superiority. And he may have imitated her. But he had to defend himself against the encroachments of this personality who loved him too much, who got in his way and threatened his life. He remained in arms against her, and held her at a distance. She too was the enemy.

XXVI

Sylvie had disappeared from the horizon. When the first months of resentment were past, she had a certain feeling of remorse as she thought of the difficulties against which her sister was struggling. She was waiting for Annette to come and ask her for help: she would not have refused it, but she was not going to offer it. But rather than ask for it Annette would have allowed herself to be cut to pieces. The two sisters were at swords' points. They had seen each other in the street and avoided each other. But once when Annette had met little Odette with one of the workers, she had not resisted an affectionate impulse; she had taken the child in her arms and devoured her with kisses. On her side, Sylvie, seeing Marc passing one day on his way home from school—he appeared not to see her—stopped him and said, "Well, don't you recognize me any more?"

One can imagine the high and mighty manner this little animal assumed as he said, "Good afternoon, aunt."

All by himself he had made his little reflexions, and, just or unjust, he had thought it best to identify himself with his mother's cause. "My country, right or wrong." Sylvie was completely taken aback. She asked, "Well, are things going as they should?"

He replied coldly, "Everything is going very well."

She watched him as he walked stiffly off, blushing from the effort he had imposed on himself. He was neat and nicely dressed. . . . The mean little thing! "Everything is going very well." She could have boxed his ears.

That Annette could manage her own affairs without her added to Sylvie's indignation. But she lost no oppor-

tunity to hear about her, and she did not give up the idea of lording it over her some day. If she could not do so actually, she could at least do so in thought. She was not unaware of the austere life which her sister led; and she did not understand why Annette condemned herself to it. She knew her well enough to be aware that a woman of her type was not made for this moral restraint, this joyless life. How could she force her nature in this way? What obliged her to live like a widow? In the absence of a husband she had no lack of friends who would be happy to lighten her troubles. If she had agreed to this, Sylvie would perhaps have respected her sister less, but she would have felt closer to her.

She was not the only one who did not understand Annette. Annette understood hardly any better herself the reasons for her monastic life, the fierce dread that led her to draw back, not merely from the possibility, but from the mere idea of one of those natural pleasures that no religious or social law could have prevented her from enjoying. (She did not believe in the morality of the Church, and was she not mistress of herself?)

"What am I afraid of?"

"Of myself."

Her instinct did not deceive her. For such a nature, filled with passions, desires, blind sensuality, there is no such thing as innocent pleasure, there is no play without consequences. The least shock would deliver her over to forces of which she was no longer the mistress. She had known long before the moral perturbation caused by her brief, passing encounters with love. The dangers would be very different today! She would no longer resist. If she gave herself up to pleasure, she would be utterly swept away by it; she would lose the faith she

needed. . . . What faith? Faith in herself. Pride? No. Faith in that inexplicable, that divine something that was within her and that she wanted to transmit unsullied to her son. Such a woman has no choice, outside the strict discipline of marriage, between an absolute moral restraint and the frankest abandonment to her passionate instincts. Everything or nothing. . . . Nothing!

And yet, at moments—in spite of her transports of proud fervor—for several months this agonizing thought gripped her by the throat:

"I am wasting my life."

Marcel Franck reappeared. Chance threw him in Annette's path; he had ceased to think of her, but he had not forgotten her. He had had a number of amorous adventures. They had not left too many marks on his flexible heart—only a few lines, like fine scratches, about his clever eyes. But they had left him with a certain fatigue, a good-natured contempt for his easy conquests and for the conqueror. Scarcely had he caught sight of Annette than he felt again the old sensation of freshness and certitude that strangely attracted this blasé sceptic. He explored her eyes; she too had seen life! In the depths of her glance there were submerged lights, paths where vessels had been, shipwrecks. But she seemed calmer and more assured. And he again regretted this wholesome companion who had already escaped him twice. He was not too late! Never had they seemed more ready to understand each other.

Without questioning her, he was able to find out in his own circumspect way about her resources and her occupations. A little later he offered her some work that was very well remunerated: it consisted in arranging notes for

the catalogue of a private collection of works of art of which he had charge. A natural excuse for spending a few hours each week with her. They were able to work and talk at the same time. The intimacy of the past was soon reëstablished.

Marcel never asked Annette about her life, but he talked about himself. This was the best way of finding out what she thought. The comic side of his love affairs offered a variety of subjects in which he delighted. He enjoyed making Annette his amused confidante, although she scolded him a little. He was the first to make fun of himself, as he made fun of everything; and she laughingly listened to his free confessions, for she was very tolerant where she herself was not concerned. He understood this to mean something else, and it gave him pleasure to see this gay intelligence that was so indulgent to life. He no longer found in her any trace of the moral pedantry, the intolerance of the young girl who is rather circumscribed by her virtue. While they exchanged their ironical reflexions, it occurred to him that it would be charming to form an attachment with this witty friend, to share with her the adventure of life. How? In any way she chose. Mistress, wife, as she wished. He had no prejudices. Just as he had attached no importance to Annette's "blossoming maternity," so he was not concerned with any encounters she might have had since then. He would never torment her with any exacting surveillance; he had no curiosity about her secret life. Let every one have his own secrets and his share of liberty! He only asked that in their life together she should be laughing and intelligent, a good comrade of his interests and pleasures. (And in pleasure he included everything, intelligence, affection and the rest.)

He thought so well of this that he spoke to her about it one evening in the library when they had finished their work and the sun, through the trees of an old garden, was gilding the tawny bindings of the books. Annette was completely surprised. What, he had come back to that; it was not finished? "Oh, my friend," she said, "how kind you are! But it can't be thought of any more."

"Oh, yes, it can be thought of," he said. "Why shouldn't it be?"

"Well, really, why not?" Annette said to herself. "I'm glad to talk to him, to see him. But, no, it's impossible! It cannot even be discussed."

Franck sat facing her on the other side of the table, his blond beard in the sunlight. With his two arms on the table, he took Annette's hands and said, "Think about it for five minutes! . . . There . . . I shall say nothing. . . . We have known each other for how many years? . . . Twelve? . . . Fifteen? . . . I don't need to explain myself. Everything I can say you know."

She did not try to disengage her hands; she smiled and looked at him. Her clear eyes were fixed upon him and yet did not see him because they had already gone beyond him. She was looking into herself. She thought, "This is not even to be discussed? Everything should be discussed! Why is it impossible? He doesn't displease me. He is a handsome fellow, attractive, good enough, intelligent, agreeable. How easy life would be! . . . But I could not live his life with him. He is pleasant, and everything pleases him. But he respects nothing, men, women, love or Annette. . . ." (It was she who was speaking, for she saw herself from outside.) "He is certainly not ungenerous so far as delicate attentions and social respect are concerned. He gives them to me in good

measure. Perhaps he even treats me with special favor. . . . But what a complete sceptic! Is there anything he takes seriously? He delights in his absolute lack of faith in human nature. He discounts its weaknesses with a complacent and sympathetic curiosity. I think he would be disappointed if the day came when he was obliged to respect it. A good soul! Yes, life would be easy with him—so easy that I should no longer have any reason to live."

Beyond that she no longer put her thought into words. But the thought pursued her, and her mind was made up.

Franck had let her hands drop. He felt that his cause was lost. He got up and walked to the window, and with his back to the window-pane he philosophically lighted a cigarette. He was behind Annette; he saw her motionless, her arms stretched over the table, as if he were still in front of her. Her beautiful blond neck and her round shoulders. . . . Lost! . . . For whom, for what, was she keeping herself? Some new Brissot-foolishness? No, he knew that Annette's heart was free. Well, then? She was not cold. She needed to love and be loved!

Above all, she needed to believe. . . . To believe in what she did, in what she wanted, in what she was seeking, in what she was dreaming, to believe in what she was, in spite of all disgusts and disappointments, to believe in herself and in life! Franck destroyed respect. Annette could more easily endure not being respected than losing respect—her own—for life. For this is the source of energy. And without the strength to act, Annette would have been nothing. For her the passivity of happiness was death. The essential distinction between human beings consists in this, that some are active, the rest passive. And of all the forms of passivity, the most mortal for

Annette would have been that of a mind tranquilly established, like Franck's, in the comfort of a doubt that no longer recognized doubt, but voluptuously surrendered itself to the indifferent stream of nothingness. Suicide! No, she refused that. Then what did she think her life would be? Perhaps nothing very happy or very complete. Perhaps it would utterly miss fire. But whether it missed or not, it would be an effort towards an end. . . . Unknown? Illusory? Perhaps. No matter! The effort was not illusory. . . . And let me fall by the wayside so long as it is *my* wayside!

She became aware of the long silence and realized that Franck was no longer there. She turned, saw him, smiled, rose and said, "Forgive me, my friend! Let us remain as we are. It is so good to be friends!"

"And not better otherwise?"

She shook her head. "No!"

"Well," he said, "here I am blackballed at the third examination!"

She laughed and, going to him, said mischievously: "Would you like at least to have what I refused you at the second examination?" And putting her arm about his neck she kissed him. An affectionate kiss. But there was no mistaking it—the kiss of a friend.

Franck was not deceived by it. "Well," he said, "let me hope that in twenty years I shall be admitted."

"No," said Annette, laughing. "There's an age-limit! Marry, my friend. You have only to choose. All the women are waiting for you."

"But not you."

"I'm going to remain a bachelor-girl."

"You'll see, you'll see. For your punishment you will marry when you are over fifty."

"'*Frère, il faut mourir.*' Before then."
"Until then, the life of a nun."
"You don't know what delights it has."

XXVII

Annette was bragging. It was not all delightful. She often felt cramped in her cloistered life. She was the kind of nun who would not have found it too much to have an abbey to manage and a God to love. The abbey was reduced to a fifth-floor apartment and God to her child. This was very little and yet it was immense. It was not what she was meant for, but she made a great deal of it. All her dreams turned round it, and with this sort of treasure she was well provided. If her every-day life was apparently puritanical and poor, she had her revenge in the life of her imagination. There, soundlessly and without friction, the eternal "enchantment" continued to flow.

But how enter these retreats of the soul? The inner dream is not woven of words. And to make oneself understand, to understand oneself, one must use words. . . . That heavy, sticky paste which dries on the tips of the fingers! To understand herself, Annette sometimes felt the need of securing her dreams by telling them over to herself in a soft voice. But these recitals were not faithful transcriptions—scarcely transmutations; they took the place of the dreams without really resembling them. Lacking the power to seize the spirit in its flight, the brain makes up stories for itself that keep it busy and deceive it about the great fairyland, the inner drama.

An immense liquid plain, a flooded valley brimming

over, a shoreless river of fire, water and clouds. All the elements were still mingled there, a thousand currents as confused as hair on a head; but there was a force that curled these long dark locks that were spangled with gleaming lights. It was the countless-faceted Spirit and its troop of dreams, led by the silent shepherd to the shadowy pastures of Hope: Desire, the king of the worlds. A resistless gravitation drove them to the greedy slope, now gentle, now abrupt, that drew them down.

Annette felt the enchanted river flowing; she rolled and unrolled on her distaff the skein of the entwined currents; she abandoned herself to it and played with the feline force that carried her on. . . . But when the reasoning powers were suddenly aroused and wished to control the play, they found that Annette, torn from her dream, was merely seeking for another that she might enter. So she soberly invented one out of the elements of her disciplined days—her memories, figures from the past, the romance of the life she had already lived or was still to live perhaps. . . . And Annette tried to make herself believe that the great dream was pursuing her. She knew it had fled, but she was not troubled. Like the bridegroom in the Gospel, it would return at an hour that no man knew.

How many feminine souls there are whose hidden genius expresses itself like hers in this inner stream! If one could read below the surface one would often find there dark passions, ecstasies, visions of the abyss. Yet all one sees is the correct middle-class woman, tranquilly going on from day to day, attending to her affairs, coolly and sensibly, mistress of herself and sometimes even, by reaction, assuming as Annette did before her pupils and

her son (though he was never deceived), an almost excessive appearance of cold, moralistic reasonableness.

No, she did not deceive the child. He had sharp eyes. He was able to read between the lines. He too knew what dreams were. Every day he had hours when he was like a king, entirely alone with his dreams, alone in the apartment. Annette, who was always imprudent, carelessly left at the disposal of the child a quantity of books, debris from the shipwreck of her library and that of the grandfather. They were of every sort. For several years she had not had the leisure to hunt through them. The little boy took charge of that. Every day, on his return from school, when his mother was not there, he would set out on the chase. He read at haphazard. Quite early he had learned to read quickly, very quickly; he galloped down the slope of the pages, pursuing his quarry. His school-work suffered from this; he was classed as a poor, scatter-brained student who never knew his lessons and skimped his duties. The teacher would have been very much surprised if the little poacher had recited what his eyes had caught in his game-preserve. He had even caught the "classics" in his snare, and what a different scent they had! Everything he gathered freely in this way, in the unknown, had for him the taste of beautiful forbidden fruit. There was nothing that could soil him yet in these encounters, nothing that could even enlighten him too brutally. His eyes passed merrily round dangerous corners without even seeing the carnal bait in the trap. But, happy and carefree, he felt the breath of warm life in his face; in this forest of books his nostrils caught the adventure and the eternal struggle of love.

Love, what is love for a child of ten? All the happi-

ness one does not possess, that one will possess—that one is going to seize. . . . What will it look like? With a few scraps of what he has seen and heard, he tries to construct its image. He sees nothing. He sees everything. He desires everything. To possess everything. To love everything. (To be loved! For him that is the real meaning of love. . . . "I love myself. I must be loved. . . . But by whom?") His memories give him no aid. They are too close for him to be able to see them well. At his age there is no past, or so little of a past. The present is the theme with its thousand variations.

The present? The child lifts its eyes and sees its mother. About the round table, under the warm light of the oil lamp, they are sitting together. Evening, after dinner. Marc is studying—supposed to be studying—his lessons for tomorrow; Annette is mending a dress. Neither of them is thinking of what he is doing. They are trusting to their machines, their willing servants. The dream rolls on. Annette follows the current. The child observes her as she dreams. . . . That is a more interesting spectacle than the lessons his lips are repeating.

Marc seemed never to have noticed what was going on about him during these years; he could not have explained any of his mother's occupations. Yet nothing had escaped him. Julien's love. Her love for Julien. He had been obscurely aware of it. And a jealousy of which he was not conscious made him rejoice, like a little cannibal who dances about the stake, in the disastrous climax. His mother remained his. His property! Did he care so much about her? He had only appreciated her when someone else had wanted her. He looked at her—those eyes, that mouth, those hands. In the manner of children who lose themselves in a detail as in a world—and they

are not always wrong—he studied each of her features. One shadow of an eyelid, the curling of a lip, are mysterious and vast landscapes. They fascinate the mind of the child. His glance hovered like a bee up and down the half-open mouth. . . . The red door. . . . It plunged into the depths, it emerged again. Searching so closely, he forgot what he was looking at, the woman herself. . . . A stupor full of affection. . . . He roused himself to remember (ugh) tomorrow's lesson, a boy he disliked, a bad mark he had hidden from his mother. . . . And then his attention was caught again by the gleam of the lamp in the shadow of the room, by the silence of the chamber amid the rumbling of Paris—that sense of a little island, of a ship at sea, and the expectation of shore, of what he was going to find, what he was going to carry away on the ship that would be full of his treasures, his hopes, the spoils of life he was going to capture. Among these he counted his mother, her beautiful blond hair and her arched eyebrows. . . . The little Viking! How much he suddenly loved her! With the ardor of a lover, but one who had kept the gift of divine ignorance! And at night, lying awake, he listened to her breathing. . . . All this mysterious life troubled him, absorbed him. . . .

So they both dreamed; but she was in mid-ocean and accustomed to the long voyage. He was just setting out, and everything was a discovery for him. And as everything was new to him, he saw with a keener eye, and often he saw further. He had moments of astonishing seriousness. They did not last. He was like an animal: suddenly this penetrating glance would waver. He would not be there any more! But in the moments when he fastened on his comrade-mother his young new force of attention and love, shut up with her in a burning silence, his whole

being was impregnated with the odor of this soul: he divined without comprehending them her faintest tremors, and he touched as if by lightning the secrets of her heart.

Soon he would lose the key. He would no longer be interested. He would no longer be able to see. There were two beings in him: the light from within and the shadow from without. As the body of the child develops, the shadow increases with it and covers the light. As he climbs, he turns his back on the sun; he seems most a child when he is least one; and when he is grown-up, his view is more limited. For the moment Marc still enjoyed a magic clairvoyance of which he was completely unaware. Never had he been closer to Annette; not for many years would he be so close again.

Towards the end of this period the attraction she had for him became stronger than his distrust. He no longer resisted the impulse that flung him suddenly, face, eyes and mouth, against his mother's breast. Annette discovered with rapture that her child loved her. She had given up hope of this.

Several months passed, as delicious as a mutual first love. The honeymoon of the child and the mother. The ravishing purity of this love, carnal as all love is, but carnal without sin. A living rose.

XXVIII

It passes. It passes, the matchless hour. They pass, these years of close intimacy, severe discipline, a crowded life. These rich years. Annette, with all her strength intact, unimpaired. The child with all the flower of his little universe.

But a mere vibration of the air will be enough to throw this harmony of souls into confusion. Is the door shut?

XXIX

One Sunday morning Annette was at home alone. Marc was playing ball with a friend in the Luxembourg Gardens. Annette was doing nothing; she enjoyed being able to rest without talking, without moving, sitting in her armchair on this day of rest; the flood of her thoughts followed its meandering course. A little stiff with weariness, she let herself float along. Someone knocked. She hesitated to open the door. Disturb this hour of silence? . . . She did not move. The knock came again; there was an insistent ring. She rose regretfully. She opened the door. . . . Sylvie! For months they had not seen each other. . . . Annette's first movement was one of joy, and Sylvie's face responded to her cordial expression. Then the memory of their grievances, their strained relations returned, and they were embarrassed. They exchanged polite questions, asked about each other's health. They spoke to each other without any formality, and in both their questions and their replies the forms of their language were familiar, but their hearts remained cold. Annette was thinking, "What has she come for?" And Sylvie, if she knew, did not seem to be in any hurry to say. All the time, while speaking of this and that, she showed that she was preoccupied with some thought she was trying to defer, but which at last came out. "Annette," she said suddenly, "let's put an end to this! There have been mistakes on both sides."

Annette, in her pride, would not admit that there were

any on hers. Strong, too strong, in her right, and not forgetting the injustice that had been done her, she said, "There were none on my side."

Sylvie did not like to go halfway and have no one come to meet her. In a tone of vexation she said, "When you have made mistakes, you should at least have the courage to recognize them."

"I recognize yours," said Annette, obstinately.

Sylvie was offended and she poured out all her old accumulated reproaches. Annette replied haughtily. They were on the point of saying the harshest things to each other. Sylvie impatiently rose to leave, but she sat down again, saying, "Stupid thing! Nothing will ever make her admit that she was wrong."

"When it isn't true," said Annette, not budging an inch.

"At least, for politeness' sake, don't make me the only one who has done wrong!"

They laughed.

They looked at each other now with softened, twinkling eyes. Sylvie made a wry face at Annette. Annette's eyes were full of amusement. But they did not lay down their arms.

"Vixen!" said Sylvie.

"I don't admit it," said Annette. "It was you who—"

"Well, let's not begin again. Listen, I am frank; wrong or right, I would not have come back here just for myself. I can't forget either—"

In spite of what she had just said, she had again begun to remember jealously, half in fun, half seriously, with a mixture of bitterness and humor, that Annette had tried to turn her husband's head. Annette shrugged her shoulders.

"Well," Sylvie ended by saying, "you may be sure that if it had been only on my own account I should not have come!"

Annette studied her curiously. Her sister said, "It was Odette who sent me."

"Odette?"

"Yes. She asked why we never saw Aunt Annette any longer."

"Really? She thought of me?" said Annette, astonished. "Who reminded her of me?"

"I don't know. She saw your photograph in my room. And then you must have made an impression on her when she met you, I don't know where, on the street, or in your house perhaps. . . . Intriguer! Looking as if you weren't interested, with that secretive manner of yours! You know very well you carry away people's hearts."

(She was only half joking.)

Annette remembered the tender little body she had caught up as she passed, on that chance encounter, and lifted in her arms, the little dewy mouth that clung to her cheek.

"Well," Sylvie went on, "I told her that we had quarrelled. She asked why. I told her to hold her tongue. This morning, in bed, when I came in to kiss her, she said to me, 'Mamma, I wish you wouldn't be angry with Aunt Annette.' I said, 'Let me alone.' But she was unhappy. So I kissed her and said, 'Do you care as much as all that for your aunt? What difference can it make to you? What an idea! Well, if you care so much about it, I shan't be angry any more.' She clapped her hands and said, 'When will she come?' 'When she wishes.' 'No, I want you to go straight away now and tell her to come.' So I started out. The little wretch! She does

what she likes with me. . . . Now you must come. We are expecting you for dinner."

Annette, with lowered eyes, said neither yes nor no. Sylvie was indignant: "I hope very much you won't have the heart to make me beg you."

"No," said Annette, lifting radiant eyes that were filled with tears.

They kissed each other passionately, half lovingly, half angrily. Sylvie bit Annette's ear. Annette cried out, "So you are biting now! Suppose it were I whom you call crazy. But it's you. Are you angry?"

"Yes, I am," said Sylvie. "How can you expect me not to hate you? You steal from me everything I have, my husband, my daughter. . . ."

Annette burst out laughing. "Keep your husband. He means nothing to me."

"Nor to me either," said Sylvie. "But he is mine. I forbid anyone to touch him."

"Why not put a sign on him?"

"You are the one I should like to put it on, you ugly old thing! . . . What is it about you that attracts them? They all fall in love with you."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, they do. All of them, Odette, that silly Leopold. . . . Other people. . . . Everybody. . . . And I too! I detest you! I wish I could get rid of you. But it can't be done. There's no way of shaking you off!"

They held each other's hands and laughed as they looked at each other, this time as sisters.

"You silly old thing!"

"You don't realize what a true word that is!"

It was a fact. They had both aged, and they both noticed it. Sylvie stealthily exhibited a false tooth which

she had had made without saying anything about it. And Annette had a lock of white hair on her temple. But she did not hide this.

"You poseur!" said Sylvie.

So they were on the best of terms again, just as in the old days. And to think that without the little girl they would never have seen each other again!

That evening Annette, with Marc, went to dinner. Odette had hidden herself: they could not find her. Annette set about looking for her; she discovered her behind a big curtain. Stooping to pick her up, as she crouched on her heels, calling her pet names, she held out her arms to the child. The little girl turned her head to one side, unwilling to look at her; then there was an explosion; she threw herself on Annette's neck. At table, where she had the happiness to be placed beside her aunt, she remained tongue-tied: she was overcome by what had happened. At the very end she took an interest in the dessert. They drank to their restored friendship, and as a joke Leopold offered a toast to the future marriage of Marc and Odette. Marc was annoyed by this; his ambitions were loftier. But Odette took it seriously. After dinner the two children tried to play together, but they did not understand each other. Marc was contemptuous, Odette was mortified. The parents, as they talked, heard slaps and tears. They separated the combatants. Both were sulking. Odette was unnerved by the emotions of the day. She had to go to bed, and she crossly refused to do so. But Annette suggested carrying her in her arms, and the child allowed herself to be taken. Annette undressed her and put her in bed, kissing her plump little legs. Odette was in ecstasy. Annette stayed by her till she was asleep—which was not long. Then, finding Marc on

Sylvie's knees, she said to her sister, "How would you like to make an exchange of the children?"

"All right!" said Sylvie.

In the bottom of their hearts neither of them would have exchanged. Marc might have suited Sylvie better, and Odette might have suited Annette. But neither would have been "her own."

The children were much more ready to accommodate themselves to an exchange. They had heard it spoken of jokingly and they clamored for it. To please them it was arranged. On Saturday evening the exchange took place between the two mothers. Odette spent Saturday night and all day Sunday at Annette's, and Marc at Sylvie's; on Sunday evening they were restored to their rightful owners. In the interregnum they were scandalously spoiled, and naturally enough they returned home grumbling. Their tenderest affections they had reserved for the one who was not their everyday mother.

Odette enchanted Annette by her fondling ways, her little confidences, her endless prattle. Annette had been deprived of this. Marc had the passionate temperament of his mother, but he knew better how to repress it; he did not like to surrender himself, especially to those who were closest to him, for they abused his confidence. With strangers it was less dangerous, for they misunderstood you anyway. Odette, like Sylvie, had endearing, expansive ways, but she had a very loving heart; she said out loud what Annette longed to hear. When the sly little creature perceived this, she doubled the dose; she awakened the echo of what Annette had thought as a child. At least, Annette imagined this, and she loved her partly because of this suggestion. Listening to her, she dreamed of her own early years which she uncon-

sciously falsified, for she threw into them the burning clearness of her thoughts of today.

These blessed Sunday mornings! The little girl lay in the big bed. (It was a holiday for her to spend the night nestling in the arms of her aunt, who received the thumps from her feet without flinching and was afraid to breathe lest she should awaken her.) She watched Annette dressing; she chattered like a sparrow. She was sole mistress of the bed, and, having affirmed her possession of it, she stretched across it and carried on while her aunt's back was turned. But Annette, arranging her hair before the mirror, laughed as she saw in its depths the little bare legs in the air and the rough brown head on the pillow. This attitude did not prevent Odette from following each of her gestures and making comic observations on her toilet. Amid her prattle the child made grave reflexions that were most unexpected and irrelevant and made Annette prick up her ears: "What did you say? Say it again."

She could not remember. . . . So she made up something else, not as good as the first thing she had said. Or, more often, she was seized with a sudden transport of affection.

"Aunt Annette! Aunt Annette!"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I love you. . . . Heavens and earth, how I love you!"

Annette laughed at the energy she put into it.

"Impossible!"

"Oh, I love you madly!"

(For, sincere as she was, she was also a born actress.)

"Nonsense! I like it better without the madness."

"Aunt Annette, I want to hug you."

"Just a minute."

"Right away. I want to. Come here, come here!"

"Yes."

She calmly finished combing her hair.

Odette turned over in bed in a pet, throwing the bedclothes in all directions.

"Ah, that woman has no heart."

Annette burst out laughing, dropped her comb, ran to the bed.

"Little masquerader, where did you pick that up?"

Odette hugged her furiously.

"Come, come, you're suffocating me. See, you've pulled my hair down again. I shall never manage to get dressed today. You monster, I don't want to have anything more to do with you!"

The little girl's voice became anxious; she was on the point of crying.

"Aunt Annette! Love me! . . . I want you to love me! I implore you to love me!"

Annette pressed her in her arms.

"Ah," said Odette, with a pathetic accent, "I would give my blood for you!" (A phrase from some newspaper serial she had heard read in the workroom.)

When Marc was a witness of these effusions, he pouted disdainfully; and, with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders raised, he marched off, assuming a superior air. He despised this babbling, this feminine sentimentality that poured everything out. As he declared to one of his small friends, "These women are silly."

At bottom, he was annoyed by the signs of affection that his mother lavished on Odette. When he was the object of them, he repulsed them; but it did not please him to have someone else get the benefit of them.

Of course, he had his aunt, and with her he could take his revenge. In fact, he did take it. To punish his mother's ingratitude he was ten times more lovable with Sylvie than Annette had ever seen him. But it must be admitted that, although Sylvie petted him, he was disappointed. Sylvie treated him as a child, and he could not endure it. He did not like her to imagine that she gave him pleasure by taking him every Sunday to the cake-shop. He was certainly not indifferent to the cake, but he did not like to have anyone insult him by believing that he attached any importance to it. Besides, he felt too much that his aunt regarded him as a personage of no importance: she was entirely unreserved with him, and, while Marc's curiosity was satisfied, his self-esteem was not. For he noticed the difference. It would have pleased him if Sylvie had taken him into her private life, not as a boy, but as a real man. In short, although he would not have admitted it to himself, he lost his illusions when he saw Sylvie at close range. The careless girl never suspected for a moment what was going on in the pure and troubled brain of the ten-year-old boy, the fabulous image he had manufactured of woman, and the shock of his first discoveries. Sylvie took no more account of her acts and her talk in his presence than she would have done before some pet animal. (We have no evidence, after all, that a pet animal is not often shocked.) Through an instinct of defence against the disillusionments which the damaging of his idol caused him, there unfortunately developed in him certain precocious ideas that were quite naïvely cynical, ideas upon which it is better not to dwell. He tried to appear (in his own eyes; for the present he did not think of appearing so in the eyes of others) a blasé man. But with all the blind senses of an eager and

innocent child, he uneasily breathed in the enigmatical charm, the animality, of the feminine being. He felt for woman a disgusted attraction.

Attraction. Repulsion. Every real man knows them. At this period of life the dominating sentiment of the two in Marc was repulsion. But even this repulsion had a sharp savor that made the other sentiments and the children of his own age seem tasteless to him. He despised Odette and regarded this little girl as beneath his dignity.

She was a very little girl in reality, and yet, strangely, a woman. In spite of the theories of those illustrious pedagogues who divide childhood into chambered compartments, one for each faculty, everything already exists in the young child from its earliest infancy, everything that one is and will be, the double Being of the present and the future (to say nothing of the immense, impenetrable past that determines both). Only, to catch a glimpse of it, one must have one's eye open. In the half-light of dawn it appears only in gleams.

These gleams were more frequent in Odette than in most children. A precocious fruit. Very healthy physically, she carried within her a little world of passions that were too great for her. Whence had they come? From some region that lay behind Annette and Sylvie? Annette was reminded of herself at Odette's age. But she was mistaken; she had been much less precocious; and when, observing Odette, she recalled the forgotten passions of her own childhood, she antedated, in all good faith, the feelings that belonged to her fourteenth and fifteenth years.

Odette was an aviary, filled with a sound of restless wings. Little invisible loves passed through her; their

flight left lights and shadows behind it. She was placid and hysterical by turns; without any reason she would begin to sob, then burst out laughing; then she would have a feeling of lassitude, of indifference to everything; then again, no one knew why, at a word, at a gesture, interpreted to suit herself, she would be happy again, so happy! . . . Overwhelmed with happiness, drunk with it, like a thrush that is gorged with grapes, she would talk, she would talk. And then, in the twinkling of an eye, she would vanish; no one knew what had become of her; they would find her again in a corner of the store-room, hiding, enjoying the inexplicable happiness she hardly understood herself. This flock of birds came and went in her soul; they succeeded one another in a flash.

One never knows how far children are entirely sincere in their emotions: as they come to them from far away, much further back than themselves, they are at first astonished to witness them, and they become actors who play with them experimentally. This power of unconsciously dividing their emotions is an intuitive process of self-preservation, permitting them to carry a burden which, without this, would crush their frail shoulders.

Odette felt, for this person or that, and sometimes for nobody, transports of passion to which she spontaneously gave a theatrical expression, not always out loud, but in a whispered monologue for her own relief; in simulating the feeling she deadened the shock. These impulses were directed most frequently towards Annette or Marc—towards the two together; and she often said Annette when she meant Marc, because Marc made fun of her, Marc despised her, and she hated him. Then she would have a paroxysm of humiliated and jealous suffering, a desire for vengeance. . . . Why? What harm could

she do him? The worst harm of all. How could she reach him? . . . Alas, she had only the claws of a child. It was exasperating. Since she could do nothing (for the moment) she would pretend to be indifferent. But it was hard to be able to do nothing; and it was hard also to be indifferent when one always had a desire to laugh or weep. Such a constraint was against nature: Odette was in despair over it. She was prostrated till suddenly a peremptory reawakening of her childish gaiety and the need of movement threw her back again into her play.

Annette watched, divined, sometimes imagined, these miniature despairs, and she pityingly remembered her own. How she too had consumed herself with the fever of loving, desiring, tormenting herself, and for whom, for what? What purpose could this all serve? It was so out of proportion with the object, which was limited by the nature of things! What a squanderer of energy! And what a force of love she spent at random! Some people had too much, others not enough. Annette, like Odette, was one of those who had too much, and her son was one of those who did not have enough. He was the lucky one, poor little fellow!

He was not so poor! The life of his affections was not less rich than Odette's, nor were the struggles of his mind less lively—though he said nothing about them. Nor were his feelings less violent, though their ardor tended in another direction. Yes, he was indifferent to the things that occupied these women. His spirit was agitated, however, by very different passions. Intellectually richer and much less absorbed by the more backward life of his senses, this little man, who felt the obscure flood of desire rising in him, was turning his energies, like a true man, towards action and domination. He dreamed of

conquests beside which that of a feminine heart would have seemed to him very paltry—if at this time of his childhood he had thought of such a thing. The boys of the preceding generations had dreamed of soldiers, savages, pirates, Napoleon, adventures on the sea. Marc dreamed of aeroplanes, automobiles and wireless. About him the thought of the world danced a giddy round; a delirious movement made the planet vibrate; everything was running and flying, cleaving the air and the waters, revolving, whirling. A magic of mad invention was transmuting the elements. No more limits to power; consequently, no more to the will. Space and time—pass the juggler's ball!—were volatilized, spirited away by the swiftness of things. They did not count any more. And men still less. What counted was will, limitless will. Marc scarcely knew the rudiments of modern science. He read, without understanding it, a scientific review to which his mother subscribed; but without realizing it he had been bathed from his birth in the miracles of science. Annette did not perceive this, for she had learned science in the scholastic way; she had not breathed it in as a living thing. She saw the figures written in chalk and the numbers on the blackboard, the arguments. Marc's imagination was filled with fabulous forces. Just because he was not embarrassed by his reason he was carried away by a poetic enthusiasm as vague and ardent as that which filled the sails of the Argonauts. He dreamed of extraordinary exploits: piercing the globe with a tunnel from one side to the other, rising without motor-power into the air, connecting Mars with the earth, pressing a button and jumping over to Germany—or some other country (he had no particular preference). With such mysterious words as volts, amperes, radium, carburator, which he used at

random, very coolly, he conjured up the tales of the Thousand and One Nights. How the devil could his mind stoop from such a height to a silly little girl?

But body and mind are twin brothers that do not keep step. In their double growth there is always one of the two—it is not always the same one—that loiters on the road while the other gallops on ahead. Marc's body remained that of a child; and while the spirit roamed about aloft a cord held him by the foot and brought him down again where it was pleasant to amuse himself. Then, for want of anything better, he would condescend to play—he would even play with his whole heart, without condescension, with the silly little girl. These were happy interludes.

They did not last long. There were too many inequalities between the two children, not only in their age, nor because she was a girl. Their temperaments were too different. Odette, who was not pretty, and rather suggested her father, though she had Annette's eyes and a chubby, well-rounded figure, with her flattish nose, was a robust, healthy child whose warmth of feeling did not disturb her physical equilibrium but seemed the natural overflow of an abounding vitality. She had escaped all the little ailments of childhood. Marc, on the contrary, had been stamped by the illness of his first year; and although later the soundness of his constitution was to come out on top, this struggle of the organism, in which he was often beaten, had spoiled part of his childhood. He had remained susceptible to the least chill and was often checked by slight returns of bronchitis or fever. His self-respect suffered from this, for all his instincts were those of pride and strength.

Towards the end of 1911, one year after the recon-

ciliation of the two sisters, Marc had one of those winter illnesses, complicated by influenza, that caused a passing anxiety. Odette went to see him when he was in bed. She had been forbidden to do so for fear of infection, but she had found a way of slipping into the room one evening when the two mothers were busy in the next room. She was full of sympathy, and Marc, who was a little feverish, let himself go as he had never done before. He was restless.

"What are they saying, Odette?" (He imagined they were hiding from him the gravity of his illness.)

"I don't know. They don't say anything."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He says it isn't anything."

He was somewhat relieved, but he was still suspicious.

"Is that true? No, it isn't true. They're concealing it from me. . . . I know very well what I've got."

"What have you got?"

He was silent.

"Marc, what have you got?"

He retreated into a proud and hostile silence. Odette was in agony. She ended by believing that he was very ill, and her anxiety communicated itself to him. With that passionate exaggeration of hers which assumed melodramatic forms she clasped her hands.

"Oh, Marc, I implore you, don't be *so* ill. I don't want you to die."

Nor had he the least desire to do so. He liked to be condoled with, but he had not wanted as much as all this! Hearing uttered what he feared himself, he was frozen with fright. He did not want to show this, but he did show it.

"You see, you're hiding it from me. You know. I am very ill."

"No, no, I don't want it to be so. I don't know. I don't want you to be very ill. . . . Oh, Marc, don't die! If you die, I want to die with you!"

She flung herself on his neck, weeping. He was very much moved, and he too wept; he did not know whether it was because of her or himself. At the sound the mothers ran in scolding and separating them. They felt very close together at that moment.

By the following morning, however, Marc had thought things over. He was no longer anxious; he was even annoyed—for to drive away his fears they had made fun of him—to have shown himself a coward; he blamed Odette for having led him, by her stupid anxiety, into betraying these signs of weakness. And then he heard her laughing and saw her passing his door, overflowing with health. He was angry with her because of this health. She had too much of it. He envied her and he was humiliated.

After he was well again, he continued for a long time to feel mortified for having betrayed himself before his cousin's eyes. He was the more so because he had really been afraid and she had seen it. Once her emotion had passed, Odette maliciously remembered it all. She had seen him off his high horse, a timid little boy. She only liked him better for this. But he could not forgive her.

XXX

Marc was well again. Odette was flourishing. The previous summer she had proudly made her first com-

munion. (It was about this date that the Church, like Joconda in search of innocence, had sniffed with its great distrustful nose the air of the time and made up its mind that there was no such thing as real innocence after the age of seven.) Odette considered herself a woman and tried to appear one by toning down her impetuosity, the impetuosity of a young tethered goat—though at any moment, with a caper, the little horned creature would escape from one's hands. . . . Sylvie was happy; her business was going well. And Annette, who found in her sister's household nourishment for the need of affection which her age and her ordeal had somewhat tempered, seemed to have reached a haven of peace. Everything was hopeful.

One warm afternoon, between three and four o'clock, at the end of October, one of those radiant days when the unveiled light seems as naked as the stripped trees, the windows were open to let in the rays of an autumn sun as mild and golden as honey. It was the day after Odette's eighth birthday. Annette was at Sylvie's. In the room over the court, they were looking out together and examining materials, gossiping and gravely occupied with their investigation. Odette was on the other side of the passage, in the room at the end that overlooked the street. Just a few minutes before, the inquisitive child had peeped through the half-open door to see what they were doing. They had pretended to scold her and had sent her back again to finish a little piece of work before they all had tea together. Marc was at school; they were expecting him home again in half an hour.

The moments were flowing along smoothly, without a ripple, without a wave, unhastingly, as if they were to flow this way for the rest of their lives. They felt so

calm that they did not even think of enjoying it. It was natural! In the ivy on the wall of the court the happy sparrows were chirping. The last flies of autumn were humming their content, warming their torpid wings in the lingering rays of sunlight. . . .

They heard nothing, nothing. Yet they both became silent at the same moment, as if the fragile thread on which their happiness was suspended had broken.

There was a ring at the door.

"Marc, so soon? No, it's too soon."

A ring. Someone was knocking again. What a hurry some people are in! We're coming!

Sylvie went and opened the door, and Annette followed her a few steps behind.

At the door the concierge, out of breath, was shouting and waving her arms. At first they did not understand.

"Madame doesn't know . . . the terrible thing that's happened. The little girl . . ."

"Who?"

"Mademoiselle Odette. . . . That poor little darling."

"What? What?"

"She's fallen."

"Fallen!"

"She's down below."

Sylvie screamed. She pushed the concierge aside and dashed downstairs. Annette would have followed her, but her legs failed her; she had to wait till her heart would allow her to walk. She was still upstairs, leaning over the baluster, when from the street the wild cries of Sylvie came to her.

What had happened? Probably Odette, who did not like to work and was dawdling and rummaging about, had leaned out of the window to see if Marc was coming and

had fallen. The poor little thing had not even had the time to understand. . . . When Annette, tottering, at last reached the street, she saw a great crowd gathered. Sylvie, like a madwoman, was holding in her arms the little broken body, with its legs and head hanging like a slaughtered lamb. The brown hair veiled the fractured skull; nothing was to be seen but a little blood at the nose. The eyes were still open and seemed to be asking. Death had replied.

Annette would have thrown herself on the ground, screaming with horror, if Sylvie's wild fury had not absorbed all the misery of the world. She had fallen on her knees on the sidewalk, almost lying on the child, whom she lifted up and shook with mad cries. She called to her, she called to her, she denounced . . . Whom? What? Heaven, the earth. . . . She was foaming with despair and hatred.

For the first time Annette saw in her sister the frantic passions that Sylvie bore without knowing it in the depths of her nature, passions that her life till then had spared her from expressing. And she recognized them as those of her own blood.

The wildness of this grief prevented her from yielding to her own. She was obliged, by reaction, to remain strong and calm, and she did so. She took Sylvie by the shoulders. The screaming woman struggled with her; but Annette, leaning over her, lifted her up; and Sylvie, submitting to this commanding gentleness, became silent, raised her head, saw the circle about her, threw a fierce glance towards it and, with the child in her arms, reentered the house without a word.

She had crossed the threshold. Annette was going in after her when she saw Marc at the corner of the street

on his way home; and, in spite of her lacerated love for the poor little girl, her heart bounded in her breast. What a joy that it wasn't he!

She ran to Marc to prevent him from seeing. At her first words, Marc turned pale and clenched his teeth. She led him away from the scene; she told him that Odette was seriously hurt. But he, with the distrustful intuition of a child, knew that she was dead; and with his clenched fists he tried to drive the terrible thought away. In spite of his agitation, he was still thinking of himself, his own attitude and the people who were passing. He noticed that his mother was walking bareheaded beside him in the street and that people were looking at them, and this embarrassed him. His annoyance contributed to calm him. When they had gone halfway, Annette, seeing that he was steadier, told him to go home alone. She returned hastily to Sylvie. She found her prostrated, sitting in a state of collapse in a corner, near the bed of the little dead girl, unable to hear or understand, breathing noisily like a wounded animal. Her workers were busy with the child. Annette bathed the little body, dressed it again in white linen, laid it back in the bed, just as on those faraway evenings—yesterday—eternally far away, when she had listened to the whispered confidences of the child. When this was finished, she went over to Sylvie and took her hand. Moist and cold, the hand lay limply in hers. Annette pressed these fingers from which the life seemed to have withdrawn, but she did not have the courage to whisper a tender word, for it could not have penetrated through the wall of despair. Nothing but the sisterly contact of their bodies could make her pity slowly find its way through. She wrapped her arms about her, her forehead resting on Sylvie's cheek; and her tears

dropped on her sister's neck as if to melt the ice that enveloped her heart. Sylvie was mute and did not stir; but her fingers were feebly beginning to respond to the sisterly hand when her husband arrived. Annette went away.

She returned to Marc and told him the truth. It was not news to him. He did not seem very much moved; he was afraid of his emotion and was anxious to keep his air of assurance. He should not have been obliged to speak, for as soon as he opened his mouth his voice began to tremble; he ran and hid himself in his room to cry. Annette perceived with a mother's insight the anguish of this childish heart in its first encounter with death, and she avoided speaking of the redoubtable subject; but she took him on her knees as she had done when he was a baby. And he, with no thought of complaining at being treated as a baby, took refuge in the warmth of her breast. After they had calmed each other, lulling their fear to sleep and feeling that there were two of them to protect each other, she put him to bed and begged him to be a brave little man, not to be frightened if she had to go out and leave him alone for a part of the night. He understood and promised.

She set out through the dark for the house of tragedy. She wanted to watch by the dead child. Sylvie had emerged from her dejected insensibility. She had not returned to her first furious despair, but the spectacle was not less painful. Her mind was a little unbalanced. Annette saw a smile on her lips. Sylvie raised her eyes as she heard her coming in, looked at her, went to her and said, "She is sleeping."

She took her hand and drew her over to the bed. "See how beautiful she is!"

Her face lighted up, but Annette saw a shadow of anxiety passing over her brow; and when, after a moment, Sylvie repeated in an undertone, "She is sleeping well, isn't she?" Annette met the feverish glance that was waiting for her to say, "She is sleeping. Yes." She said it.

They went and sat down in the adjoining room. The husband was there with one of the workers. They forced themselves to talk in order to occupy their attention. But Sylvie's wounded mind was running away from itself, leaping from one subject to another, without stopping. She had taken up some work which at every moment she threw down again; she took it up and threw it down to listen for sounds from the sleeper's room. Again she said, "How she sleeps!"—her eye wandering over the others in order to convince them, to convince herself. Once she returned to the little bed, and, leaning over the child, uttered endearing words to it. This was cruel for Annette. She wished Sylvie would be silent. Leopold, in a low voice, implored her not to disturb the illusion.

The illusion fell of itself. Sylvie, coming back to her place, took up her work and did not speak again. The others were talking around her, but she no longer heard them. They in turn became silent. A sombre hush hovered over them. Suddenly Sylvie cried out. Without words. A long cry. Throwing herself down on the table, she struck her head against it. Hurriedly they removed the needles and the scissors. When her speech came back to her, it was to curse God: she did not believe in Him, but she had to have someone against whom to avenge herself! Her eyes blazed, and she hurled vulgar oaths at him.

Exhaustion followed. They carried her to bed. She

did not stir again. Annette remained beside her until she was unconscious.

Then she went home again, utterly worn out. The streets were pale with early dawn. Marc had not slept. She lay down shivering. But just as she was about to get into bed—it was too much, all she had suffered and had to repress during the last twelve hours!—she ran in her nightgown and bare feet into her son's room and passionately kissed his mouth, his eyes, his ears, his neck, his arms, his hands. "My dear, my dear little boy," she said. "You, you are not going to leave me?"

He was very much upset, disturbed, frightened. He wept with her, more for himself than for the others, though he wept for the others too. He realized now what he had lost; he wept over the affection he had never desired. He remembered the evening when he had been ill and Odette had come in to see him. He was stricken with affection and sorrow. But he thought, "I'm still alive anyway!"

Annette trembled at the thought of beginning another day like the last. Her strength was not equal to it. But the day that followed did not have the terrifying violence of the previous hours. Human suffering, when it reaches its zenith, must descend again. One dies or becomes used to it.

Sylvie had recovered her self-possession. She was livid, with hard lines about her nostrils and lips which later, as they grew fainter, left scars behind. But she was calm, active, busy, with her workers, cutting and sewing her mourning clothes. She gave orders, oversaw things, worked; and her hands, like her expression, were sure and precise. She fitted Annette's dress. Annette was afraid to utter a word that would recall the funeral. But

Sylvie spoke of it coldly. She would not leave the details to anyone else. She decided everything. She preserved her unnatural calm to the very end of the ceremony, but with a cold and concentrated rage she had set herself against any religious service. She could not forgive! . . . Till then she had been vaguely sceptical, indifferent, not hostile; and while she laughed at it a little, she had been moved without confessing it on the day when she had seen her beautiful little girl dressed in white for her first communion. . . . Exactly! She had been tricked. . . . That dastardly God! She could never forgive him.

Annette was expecting that the inhuman constraint which Sylvie had imposed upon herself would be paid for by a fresh crisis when they returned to the house. But she was not allowed to stay with her sister. Sylvie harshly forbade it. Annette's presence was intolerable to her. . . . Annette had her son!

On the following day the anxious husband came to tell Annette that Sylvie had not gone to bed. She had not wept, she had not groaned, she was eating her heart out in silence. She had relentlessly resumed her work in the shop, a mechanical duty that was more imperative than life. No one would have perceived her state of mind except for certain accidents, errors that had never happened before. She cut a gown wrongly and afterwards destroyed it without a word, and she hurt her fingers with her scissors. They induced her to go to bed at night, but she remained sitting upright without sleeping, and she did not reply when they spoke to her. And every morning, before appearing in the workroom, she made a visit to the cemetery.

This went on for fifteen days. Then, in the middle of

the afternoon, she disappeared. Customers came in and waited. At supper-time she had not returned. Ten, eleven o'clock passed. Her husband feared that something desperate had happened. Towards one o'clock she came in, and that night she slept. No one could find out anything from her. But the next evening she vanished again, and on the two following days she did the same thing. She talked now; she seemed to have relaxed. But she did not say where she had gone. The workers gossiped. Her good husband shrugged his shoulders with pity and said to Annette, "If she is deceiving me I can't be angry with her. She has suffered too much. . . . And besides, if it can only save her from her obsession, well, all right!"

Annette succeeded in catching Sylvie as she was going out, and she tactfully made her understand the anxiety, the suspicion, the pain, which her wanderings caused. Sylvie, who did not want to be stopped at first, seemed to be indifferent to what people might think, but she was touched by her husband's kindness; and, as if she felt a sudden need of unbosoming herself, she led Annette into her room and shut the door. She sat down close beside her and in a low, mysterious voice, with shining eyes, confessed that she went every evening to a circle of initiates who gathered about a table in order to talk with her little girl. Annette listened, horrified, without daring to betray her feelings, while Sylvie, in a soft voice, recounted the child's replies. There was no longer any need to urge her to talk; she delighted in the joy of repeating to herself out loud the puerile words into which she had transfused all the blood of her heart. Annette could not destroy an illusion that gave her sister life. Leopold was ready to encourage her: for his sound com-

mon sense this was as good as any other religion. Annette asked the advice of the doctor, who told her to let the sorrow wear itself out.

Sylvie was radiant now. Annette asked herself if she would not have preferred a noble despair to this preposterous joy that profaned death. In the workroom Sylvie no longer concealed her relations with the world beyond the grave; the workers made her describe the séances; it gave them all the shivering pleasure of a popular novel. When Annette came in, she heard them mingling their lively reflexions with the account of the last conversation Sylvie had had with Odette; one apprentice was laughing at it behind the material she was folding up; and Sylvie, so lately an expert in the handling of irony, saw nothing as she babbled away, absorbed in her phantasmagory.

She did not stop there. One evening, without saying anything to Annette, she took Marc with her. She had come to feel once more an exalted affection for him. The moment she saw him her face lighted up. Annette, not finding Marc in the house, guessed what had happened. But she took care not to make him tell her about it when he came in, very late, depressed and unnerved. The child cried in his dreams. Annette lifted him up, calmed him, stroked his head with her tender hands.

In the morning she severely demanded an explanation from Sylvie. Her son was involved, and she spoke directly to the point. This time she did not conceal her disgust and aversion for these dangerous follies, and she angrily forbade her sister to mix the little boy up in them. Sylvie, who, at other times, would have replied in the same tone, bowed her head with an equivocal smile, avoiding Annette's furious look; she did not feel instinctively

sure enough of her revelations to expose them to her sister's passionate criticism. She would discuss nothing, she promised nothing; she had a sly, wheedling manner, like that of a scolded cat that still means to do just what it chooses.

She did not venture, however, to carry Marc off again. But she did confide to him what she had heard in her séances; and it was very difficult to prevent their meetings, which Marc distrustfully kept as secret as his aunt. Sylvie told Marc that Odette spoke of him. It was this that bound her to the young boy: Odette had bequeathed him to her. She transmitted messages between the two children. Marc did not really believe in all this; the critical sense of his grandfather defended him against these absurdities, but his imagination was stirred. He listened, interested, repelled. Even while he lent himself to this unwholesome game, he condemned Sylvie severely; and he extended his condemnation to women in general. But this atmosphere of the grave was poisonous for a boy of his age. The horrible buffoonery of life and death gave him a precocious, haunting obsession. He felt surrounded by an odor of decayed flesh. He had moments of suffocation; and, as his mind was not yet strong enough to defend him, his feverish, preadolescent vitality reacted by taking refuge in his troubled instincts, which roved about like animals in the night. A redoubtable flock they were! It seems as if, by a sort of embryogenesis, the psychic organism passes in its evolution through the whole series of animal forms—has to pass through the most bestial stages before it reaches the point where they can be sublimated by intelligence and human will. Fortunately, this return to our savage origins is brief; it is a procession of spectres, and the best thing is to stand aside and let

them pass as quickly as possible, doing nothing to arouse their shadowy consciousness. But this hour is not without its dangers, and the most loving watchfulness cannot protect the child from them. For this little Macbeth is the only one who sees the spectres. For the others, those who are closest to him, Banquo's seat remains empty; they perceive the fresh voice, the pure features of the child, but they do not see the formidable shadows that pass in the depths of its limpid eyes. The curious spectator himself hardly sees them. How can he recognize them, since they issue from a world in which he was not born, these instincts of possession, violence and even crime? There is no perverse thought that he does not touch, that he does not taste with the tip of his tongue. Neither of the two women who petted Marc dreamed what a little monster it was they held so close to them.

Little by little Sylvie grew calm. The accounts of her séances ceased to have a mysterious character; she spoke of them unfeelingly, hurriedly. She did not care to dwell on them. Soon she even ceased to mention them except with a certain constraint. And suddenly she stopped speaking of them altogether; she no longer replied to questions. Had she met with some disillusionment she did not wish to acknowledge? Or was she tired of them? She told no one. But in the long conversations she continued to have with Marc the occult world held less and less of a place, and it ended by disappearing. She seemed to have recovered her equilibrium. The passing of the ordeal was only evident to those about her by the appearance of a slight change in her age, an expression that was not more refined through suffering, but rather more material, by features that were a little heavier and a somewhat fuller figure. She still had the same grace, and she

was brighter than ever. The powerful need to live avenges itself for the agony that has been endured. And new pains and new pleasures, the leaves of the falling days, the dust of the road, little by little covered the grave in her heart.

XXXI

A deceptive appearance.

Life began again in the Rivière household. But the catastrophe had made a breach in their souls.

The disappearance of a child is a very small event in the general order of things. We are surrounded by death; it should never surprise us. From the moment when we begin to look about us, we see it at work and grow accustomed to it. We think we grow accustomed to it. We know that some day it will come and work its will in our own homes, and we foresee our misery. But there is so much more than misery! Let each one look into his own heart! There are few who will not recognize the revolution that a death has produced in their whole existence. It marks a change of eras . . . *Ante, Post Mortem.* . . . A being has disappeared. Life in its entirety is affected, a whole kingdom of beings, yesterday the kingdom of the day and today that of the shadow. If this little stone, this one stone, falls from the vault, the whole vault falls. Nothingness has no measure. If this little I is nothing, no I is anything. What I love is nothing; I who love am nothing. For I only exist because I love. The unreality of everything that breathes becomes suddenly apparent. And everyone is aware of this, though not in the same fashion, everyone, with all his

organs, his instinct, his intelligence, whether he faces it directly or averts his eyes and flees from it.

On the family tree from which the little branch of Odette had been broken off the other branches continued to grow. But the development of three at least of the four was altered.

The least affected was the father. On the day of the funeral his grief was painful; his throat and his chest panted like those of a fallen horse. But a fortnight later he was already caught up again by his business and the powerful demands of his physical life; he was working, eating twice as much as ever, travelling, forgetting.

Of the two women Annette seemed to be the real mother. She could not be consoled. Her grief became all the more bitter the more the traces of the little girl were obliterated. Odette for her was like a chosen child, a child created not of her flesh, but of her need of affection, more hers than Sylvie's, more hers than her son. She accused herself of not having loved her enough, of having begrudged the caresses of which this eager little heart had never had enough. And she persuaded herself that she alone preserved the memory of the child to which the others were false.

Sylvie exhibited now a strange, busy, agitated gaiety. She talked in a high voice, with a wearisome flow of words, flashes of jocularity, harsh tittle-tattle that made her little group of workers burst out laughing. Marc quietly drank it all in when he happened to be there and heard it flying about him. He too had relaxed; he was working less, loafing, running about the streets, always looking for opportunities to do nothing and laugh. His organism was shielding itself against the terror within. . . . What outsider could have suspected it? We are

impenetrable to one another; we seem indifferent; we want to unbosom ourselves and we cannot do so. . . . "There is no communion possible in suffering."

But Annette, whose intense devotion to the dead child made her unjust to the living, saw only their egoism. In every way it was trying to return to life and let the stone of memory drop to the bottom; and she was angry with them.

One day, however, one Sunday when Marc had gone out with Leopold to a ball-game, Annette, arriving at Sylvie's, found the door of the apartment open. She went in and heard a long, heavy groan. Sylvie, alone in her closed room, was talking and moaning. Annette withdrew on tiptoe; she reclosed the door on the landing and rang. Sylvie came and opened it; her eyes were red; she said it was a cold and talked with a noisy, rather vulgar animation. She began to tell one of those eternal indecent stories of which she seemed to have an endless supply. Annette's heart sank. Was it possible she was pretending? She was only half pretending. It was herself, far more than others, whom she wished to deceive. An utter despair, without a gleam or an outlet, had brought her to a sort of jocose contempt for life. If she did not want to die, there was no other alternative but forgetfulness and this mask of careless cynicism which had ended by replacing the features of the true face. Nothing meant anything. Nothing was worth the trouble. Propriety, honor, were all humbug! Nothing was worth taking seriously. Laugh at life! Enjoy yourself! Work alone continued to exist, for work was a necessity, and one couldn't get along without it.

Many other things continued to exist beneath all this devastation. Instinct in Sylvie was sounder than thought,

and when she threw away everything else Annette and her son remained in her flesh and blood. They were only one person, these three! But this instinctive, almost material, love did not prevent her from cherishing bad feeling. Sylvie had no more tenderness for Annette than she had for herself. She was aggressive and full of mockery in her attitude to her sister, whose earnestness and silent sadness, heavy with memories, irritated her like an unspoken reproach.

A reproach indeed. Annette did not have the charity to spare her. She saw clearly, however, that Sylvie was fleeing from her misery as a hunted animal flees from a dog, and she pitied her. She pitied the misery of human nature, but she despised it for seeking safety at the expense of its dearest treasures, for being always ready to betray its sacred affections in order to elude the savage pursuit of suffering. She was embittered by this; for in her own heart she heard the call of this cowardice in the presence of life, and she scourged it.

Consequently, during these months that followed the disaster, she imposed upon herself an austere discipline of the heart, a proud, pessimistic restraint that concealed her wounded love.

After the dark winter Easter had come. That Sunday morning Annette was wandering about Paris. The sky had blossomed again; the air was motionless. With her soul wrapped in its mourning, she heard the nostalgic calls of the church-bells; and their sonorous net caught her up in its meshes, drew her outside the flood of this indifferent age to the beach where the dead God lay. She entered a church. She had scarcely taken two or three steps before she was stifled by her tears; she had repressed

them so long, and they were flowing again. On her knees, with bowed head, in a corner of a chapel, she let them flow. Never had she felt as now the tragedy of this day. She listened to the organ, to the hymns, the hymns of joy. . . . Joy! . . . Sylvie's laughter, with her soul weeping in its depths. . . . Ah, she realized it so clearly today: there was no resurrection for the poor dead! And the despairing love for one's own, that age-old love, wearing itself out denying their death. . . . How much more grand and religious this poignant verity was than an illusory resurrection! That passionate self-deception, that heart-breaking self-deception, which could not consent to losing one's beloved ones.

She could not share her thoughts with anyone. Shut up in herself, with the little dead girl, she defended her against the second, the most terrible, of deaths, oblivion. She reacted harshly against herself and against the others. And as every reaction against a way of thinking leads by its recoil to a contrary reaction, her attitude of reproach provoked those who felt themselves hurt by it to exaggerate their own. And the breach widened.

It became almost complete between the mother and the son. Marc grew further and further away from Annette. For years the antagonism had been growing more evident, but until these latter days it had remained, on the child's side, veiled, hidden, cautious. During the long period when he had lived so intimately with Annette, he had been very careful not to fall into any argument with her; he would have been no match for her, and above everything else he wanted peace. He let his mother talk. Thus, one by one, she revealed her weaknesses to him, while he revealed nothing. But now that he had found an ally in his aunt, he no longer concealed

his hand. How many times in the past his mother, losing patience with this little mollusc, who drew his mind back into his shell when she wanted to reach it, had said to him, "Come out of your hole! Let's have a glimpse of your head. Don't you know how to talk?"

He knew. Annette could have her satisfaction. He talked now. . . . It would have been better if he had continued to be silent! . . . What a little wrangler! Ah, he no longer hesitated to contradict her. He allowed nothing to pass from his mother's mouth without obstinately cavilling at it. And in what an impertinent tone!

This had happened all of a sudden; and no doubt Sylvie, by maliciously encouraging this warfare, was partly responsible for it. But the real cause lay deeper. This change of attitude corresponded with a change of nature, for the crisis of puberty was approaching. The child was transformed. In a few months he had assumed another character, and his rude and crotchety ways were interspersed with returns of his old taciturnity. There was nothing left of the polite, conciliatory, rather crafty silence of the child who wanted to give pleasure; one felt now something hostile and bristling in him. . . . His brusque, off-hand manner, his flagrant impoliteness, the inexplicable harshness with which he responded to affectionate advances, made Annette's sensibility bleed. Sufficiently armed against the world, she was not at all so against those whom she loved; a single rude word from her son wounded her to tears. She did not show this, but he was not unaware of it. He went on; he seemed to be seeking for things that might be unpleasant to his mother.

He would have been ashamed to behave so with people for whom he cared nothing. But to her he was certainly

not indifferent. He clung to her. How? Like the living fruit which, when the hour has come, breaks away from the mother's womb. He was made of her flesh, and to make this flesh his own he tore it.

Marc had many elements that belonged by nature to another race than his mother's. But, strangely enough, it was not through these different elements that he most came into conflict with his mother: it was through those he had in common with her. For his jealous desire for independence was not yet in possession of a personality that properly belonged to him, and every resemblance to his mother seemed to him a sort of threat of annexation. So, to defend himself, he tried to be different. Whatever she said, whatever she did, he was the opposite. Because she was loving, he was insensible; because she was confiding, he shut himself up; because she was passionate, he was cold and cutting. And everything that she fought, everything that was repugnant to Annette's nature—ah, how well he knew these things!—became attractive to him, and he made haste to let Annette know it. Because she cared about her morality, the wilful child considered it the proper thing to regard himself as unmoral and made a point of proclaiming, "Morality is all fiction."

So he declared to his mother, and the credulous Annette took it seriously. She attributed it to the deplorable influence of Sylvie, who amused herself by casting disorder into the little soberly cultivated brain. . . . There they go into the flower-beds, a handful of wild seeds! And she raked the smooth paths the wrong way. She had plenty of good reasons for persuading herself that she was acting in the interest of the child. "That poor little fellow, shut up in a greenhouse, kept locked up in a box!

We're going to take him out of his flower-pot!" Even while she loved her sister, she took a lively and cruel pleasure in stealing away from her this heart that was a slip of her own.

The shrewd self-interest of the child in everything that concerned him had perceived the duel that was being waged between the two sisters, and naturally he exploited it. He cunningly kept his favors for Sylvie, and he was much pleased by the jealousy which he aroused in his mother. Annette no longer concealed this. She justified it, with more reason than Sylvie, as being in Marc's interest. Sylvie loved the child and she had plenty of common sense. Her light wisdom was just as good as the weightier wisdom of some other people, but it was not suitable for a boy of thirteen, and the good he got from it was dangerous. If she sharpened in him the appetite for life, she did not give him respect for it; and when respect vanishes too early, look out for a smash! Sylvie was no person to form Marc's taste, except in the matter of clothes. She took him to silly movies and music-halls from which he brought back bewildering songs and images that left little room for serious thoughts, and his work showed the effects of it. Annette was angry and forbade Sylvie to take Marc out. This was a good way of sealing the alliance of the nephew and the aunt. Marc felt that he was persecuted; he discovered that, in our time, the profession of being an oppressed people is remunerative; and Annette learned, to her cost, that that of the oppressor is not all tranquillity.

On every occasion Marc now made her feel that he was a victim and that she abused her strength. Well, so be it! She would abuse it to keep him in line. She would not tolerate the frivolity of his language, the unseemly

habit he had picked up of making fun of everything, his impertinent blague. To subdue it she opposed him with her severe principles. He had a fine blow to give her in return. For a long time he had been waiting for the chance.

One day when he was finding support in his aunt's words against some prohibition of his mother's, Annette impatiently told him that Sylvie had the right to say and do what she wanted; one couldn't condemn her, but what was good for her was not good for him. He was not to take her as a model. "She is not to be imitated in everything."

Marc listened to the tirade and said carelessly, "Yes, but she has a husband."

Annette could not reply at first; she did not want to understand. What had he said? No, it wasn't possible! And then a blush spread over her forehead. Sitting there, with her hands motionless over her work, she did not stir. Nor did he make any further movement. He was not very proud of what he had said, of what was about to happen. The silence continued a long time. A flood of anger rose in Annette's vehement heart. She let it pass. Pity, irony, took its place. She sighed contemptuously. "Little wretch!" she thought. And at last, as her fingers resumed their task, she said, "And no doubt you consider that a woman without a husband who works to support her child is less worthy of respect?"

Marc lost his poise. He did not reply. He did not excuse himself. He was mortified.

That night Annette did not sleep. So she had sacrificed herself in vain! That the world should blame her was in the order of things. But he to whom she had given everything! How had he known? Who had breathed

this thought into his ear? She could not be angry with him, but she was overwhelmed.

Marc slept peacefully. He was not free from remorse, but the sleep was stronger than the remorse. After a good night he would have forgotten it if he had not encountered it again in his mother's anxious look. It annoyed him that his mother had not forgotten as he had. He was sorry, but he could not make up his mind to say so; and, since he was uncomfortable, his childish logic made him angry with his mother.

They did not allude to the scene. But after it things were no longer as they had been before. They were constrained when they kissed each other. Annette no longer treated him wholly as a child.

How had he known? Conversations at school had made him reflect on the name he bore, which was that of his mother. Old allusions, picked up as they had passed in old days in the workshop, which he had not understood, became clear now. Some imprudent words of Sylvie to her sister, in the child's presence. And the enigma this mother was for him, at once irritating and fascinating him, through the aura of passions which, without the power to discern them, his puppy-instinct had scented. Over it all he had built a strange, vague fairy-tale which did not hang together very closely. His birth puzzled him. How could he find out about it? The reply that hurt his mother was partly a trap he was setting for her. In his heart there was a mingled curiosity and bitterness in regard to what had happened, about which he knew nothing. He had never dared to question Sylvie on the subject, for he was proud on his mother's behalf and he suspected that she had been wronged. But he thought he had the right to be angry with her because of the important secret she

was hiding from him. This secret stood like a stranger between herself and him.

A stranger indeed. Marc never suspected that at moments he invoked before his mother's eyes the stranger, his father, and, even worse, the other Brissots. For in the secret warfare that went on henceforth between the mother and the young boy the latter instinctively armed himself with everything he could find, in his own nature, that was opposed to Annette. Thus, without knowing it, he sometimes disinterred and used against her various traits he had inherited from his Brissot ancestry: the famous condescending smile, the self-satisfaction, the waggish philistinism the hostile certitude of which nothing could shake. A shadow, a reflexion on the water. Annette recognized them and thought, "They have caught me!"

Was he really a stranger? No, he was not. The weapon, the inherited traits, yes; but the hand that held it was of Annette's substance. And that rebellious hand was clenched in that opposition between two beings who were too closely related, too much akin, which was only one of the thousand tricks of Love and Destiny.

XXXII

He had no friends. This boy of thirteen, who spent every morning and afternoon in a class with thirty other children, was isolated from his comrades. When he was smaller, he had enjoyed chattering, playing, running, shouting. For a year or two now, he had had fits of speechlessness, a sudden hunger for solitude. This did not mean that he had ceased to feel the need of com-

panions. He may even have needed them more than before. Exactly! He needed them too much; he expected too much and he had too much to give. And there were bristles everywhere in this spring thicket. A bridling self-esteem. A mere nothing wounded it, and he was afraid of being wounded and especially of showing it. That was a weakness, and he had to take care not to give the enemy a hold over him. (There is an enemy in every friend.)

What he had grasped, or rather imagined, regarding his civil status, his mother's past, kept him in an absurd, ridiculous, towering state of torment. His reading contributed to this; he was convinced that he was a "natural" child. (His romantic books called him by a harsher name.) He found a way of taking pride in this. He almost went so far as to catch in the archaic insult the wild, musty scent of nobility. He considered himself interesting, different from other people, solitary, just a little damned. It would not have displeased him to find himself among the satanic bastards of Schiller and Shakespeare. This would have given him the right to despise the world, with lofty tirades —in secret.

But when he found himself in the world again—in his class at school, among his comrades—he was intimidated, weighed down by his secret, suspicious that they might guess it. His strange ways, his fated look, the thin voice that was beginning to break, his pretty girlishness, blushing, yet insolent as a young cock, excited the attention and the ill-will of his companions and even exposed him to the shameful advances of one of those little scamps who persecuted him with his half-comic, half-serious, proposals. He was completely upset by this; that night he was sick with revolt and disgust. He did not want to go

back to school again, and he could not tell his mother the reasons; he had to win respect for himself unaided. He said to himself, "I shall kill him."

His riotous mind was excited by a deep ground-swell.

He had reached the time when the reproductive forces awaken. They fascinated him and terrified him. The strange innocence of his mother existed there beside him without seeing or suspecting anything. He would have died of shame if she had seen or suspected. And alone, despising himself, he surrendered frantically to the terrible solicitations of the degrading instinct. . . . But what could the child do, a poor child delivered over to these mad forces? This monstrous nature puts into a thirteen-year-old body the brutal fire which for want of nourishment devours it. There are natures which find salvation in throwing themselves wholly, through a contrary excess, into an ascetic exaltation of the spirit which often entails physical ruin. The young people of our time, more fortunate than their elders, have begun to practise the virile discipline of athletics. Marc would have asked nothing better than this, but there again nature was against him. He was not strong enough. Ah, how he envied the strong! How jealously he loved their beauty! . . . So much that he hated it. . . . He would never be like them.

Desires, all the desires, pure, impure, a chaos! . . . All the hostile demons! He would have been the plaything of chance—nothing could have helped him—had it not been for a basis of moral health and decency—rather, the grandeur that is unaware of its own capabilities, that divine something, the result of the sufferings, the valor, and the long patience of the best of the race, which will not endure the shame of defilement, the disgrace of falling, which has an anxious instinct for what is vile and

cowardly, which follows its trail inward, into all the sinuosities of one's thought, which does not always escape stains, but never fails to condemn them, to condemn oneself, to brand oneself and punish oneself.

Pride! All praise to pride! *Sanctus!* . . . In childish natures like this pride is health. It is the affirmation of the divine in the mire, the principle of salvation. In a solitude without love who would struggle without pride? Why struggle, if one does not believe one has supreme blessings to defend, and that for them one must conquer or die! . . .

Marc was determined to conquer. Conquer what he understood and what he did not understand. Conquer what he was ignorant of and what was repugnant to him. Conquer the enigma of the world and his own baseness. Ah, here as elsewhere, he was incessantly conquered. In his effort to work, to read, to concentrate, he slipped beyond his own control, he found himself out of hand. He always lacked the strength. . . . It was there, but it was hardly formed, unequal to the task and the demands of the will. He was devoured by desires and curiosities, healthy, unhealthy, that plagued him on all sides, weltering as he was in torpor, incapable of doing anything or determining anything. He wasted his time, and he was always in a hurry. Already his future filled his mind, the choice of a career; for he knew that it would be necessary for him to decide early, and he had no grounds for deciding; he floated through everything, equally interested and indifferent, attracted and disgusted. He wanted and he did not want; he was not even capable of wishing or of not wishing. The machine was not running aright. It would bound forward and suddenly stop, and he would find himself sprawling on the ground.

Then he looked around him. And this child who was suffering and devouring himself was quicker than anyone else to perceive the emptiness and the ennui of an age that had begun its journey to destruction. He had a keen sense of the abyss.

But his mother saw none of all this. She saw a sulky, overweening, rebellious, childish boy, morbidly susceptible, grandiloquent, always making trouble, who sometimes took delight in uttering obscenities, and at other moments was shocked at a mere free expression. Above all, she was irritated by his sneers. She had no suspicion of his feeling of bitterness, still less of his defiance of an evil fate. He felt cruelly the injustice of his lot; he was (or thought himself) without strength, without beauty, without talent, good for nothing; he ended by swamping himself, adding to his real defects others that he imagined; he conspired with all the outward signs that were able to humiliate him. . . . Those two little working-girls who laughed as they passed him were laughing, he thought, at him; he did not suspect that they were laughing just to arouse his interest, that they rather liked his blushing, shyly girlish air. He thought he saw in the eyes of his teachers a contemptuous pity for his mediocrity. He thought his more robust comrades despised his weakness and were showing up his cowardice; for since he was excessively nervous, he had his moments of pusillanimity; and, as he was sincere, he confessed this to himself and felt that he was dishonored. As a means of self-punishment, he secretly compelled himself to commit dangerously imprudent acts that brought the cold sweat to his brow and rehabilitated him a little—so little!—in his own eyes. It was at himself, often, that this little Nicodemus was sneering, at himself and his own weaknesses. But he

was angry with the world that had made him what he was, and especially with his mother.

She did not understand his hostile air. . . . What an egoist he was! He thought only of himself.

He thought only of himself? What would have become of him if he had not thought of himself? If he had not helped himself, who would have helped him?

They remained alone, walled up, side by side. The day of confidences was past. Annette was beginning to repeat the lamentation of mothers, "How much more loving he was when he was younger!"

And he was saying to himself that mothers only love their children for their own amusement. No one loves anyone but himself.

No, everyone wants to love the other person. But when one is in danger one must think of oneself. One will think of the other afterward. How can one save the other if one hasn't saved oneself? And how can one save oneself if one lets the other hang about one's neck?

XXXIII

Annette, pushed aside by her son, became as hard as he. When the heart is deliberately closed to love, the mind, freed by the absence of the object that nourishes its affection, is driven to satisfy its intellectual hunger and its need of action. She worked all day, read in the evening, and at night slept soundly. Marc spitefully envied and despised the health of this vigorous woman, the faculty she seemed to have for escaping self-torment.

Annette, however, suffered from the privation of not

being able to share her thoughts with a companion. She filled the void by work, by actively forgetting. . . . But work for work's sake is itself so empty! . . . And upon whom can one spend those unused forces one feels in oneself?

Sacrifice! . . . That need of sacrifice! . . . Annette found it everywhere about her, often pathetic, sometimes absurd. For as a good observer she incessantly explored faces and souls every day and all day long; she distracted herself from her own troubles by throwing herself into those of others. Perhaps curiosity prevailed over pity during this period when her heart was petrified (as she thought) by the spectacle of so much suffering, and especially so many defeats and abdications.

Among women who are struggling as she was to wrest from society the means of existence, how many are broken, far less by the harshness of things than by their own weakness and abnegation! Almost all are exploited by some affection and cannot exist without being exploited. One would say that this is their only reason for living—the reason for which they die. . . .

One of them sacrifices herself to an old mother or an egotistical father. Another, to a vulgar husband or some man who deceives her. Another, another—myself!—to a child who does not love her, who will forget her, who will betray her tomorrow perhaps. . . . Well, what does it matter? If I find a joy in being betrayed by him, imposed upon, forgotten? "If it pleases me to be beaten!" Ah, derision, trickery! . . . And the others envy you, those who have no one to whom to sacrifice themselves! They marry a dog, a cat, a bird. Each one has her idol. If you must have one at any price, God would serve better. He, at least, amounts to something. . . . I too have my

God, my unknown God, my hidden truth, and this passion that drives me on to seek it. . . . Deceptive, perhaps, like the others. But I shall not know it till I have reached it. And if this is deceptive, at least it is elevated and worth the trouble.

Annette revolted against the absurdity of some sacrifices. No, nature does not wish the best to be sacrificed to the most unworthy. And if she did wish it, why should I submit to it? But she does not wish it! She wishes one to sacrifice oneself to the best, to the grandest, to the strongest.

Sacrifice at any price, to the worst as to the best, perhaps even to the worst by preference, because the sacrifice is thus most complete, sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice—yes, that is conformable enough to the idea people have of God . . . *Credo quia absurdum* . . . Like master, like man! This God is indeed he who rests on the Seventh Day, finding that which he has made is well made. If one had listened to him, the chariot of man would have stopped at the first turn of the wheel. All the progress of the world is made against his will . . . *Fiat!* We shall drive the chariot on. It may crush us, but at least we wish it to go forward.

XXXIV

A tragic incident increased Annette's aversion to these immolations that seemed to her so pointless—immolations of those who were worth more to those who were worth less.

She had recently been in competition, for a course for foreigners at an institution at Neuilly, with a young

woman whose strong-willed rustic face had attracted her. She tried to strike up a conversation with her. But she was suspicious and could think of nothing but getting Annette out of the way. At that time Annette, who was still unused to these struggles that repelled her, had held up her own end badly; indeed, through her desire to make a friend, she had withdrawn in the interest of her rival. The latter had shown her no gratitude for this. Nothing counted for her but her own advantage. An ant eagerly hastening to heap up her gains. Annette did not interest her.

Annette had lost sight of her, and when, six years later, chance brought them again into one another's presence, they had both changed. Annette was no longer disposed to be generous, or rather fastidious. . . . Life is as it is. . . . I am not able to modify it. I want to live. You must take second place.

The struggle began. It did not last long. At the first blow the rival was knocked out. How she had aged! Annette was struck by her ravaged look. She had remembered her as a brunette with ruddy cheeks marked with two or three little black dots like raisins in bread, a solid peasant girl, short-waisted, thick-set, a face with fine, dry features, which, if it had not been so sullen, would not have lacked a certain grace—a stubborn brow, abrupt, always hurried movements. She saw now a thin, shrivelled face, a hard glance, a bitter mouth, hollow cheeks, young but blighted like scorched grass.

The disputed situation was that of secretary to an engineer: it required only two mornings of attendance each week to go through the business correspondence and receive visitors. Annette encountered Ruth Guillon in the antechamber, and their hostile eyes met.

"You have come for this place," said Ruth Guillon. "It has been promised to me."

"It has not been promised to me," said Annette. "But I have come for this place."

"No use, it's going to be given to me."

"Whether it's useless or not, I've come. It belongs to the one who gets it."

A moment later Annette was called into the engineer's office and chosen. She was known as an accurate, intelligent worker.

As she came out she ran into Ruth and passed her coldly. Ruth stopped her and asked, "You are going to have it?"

"I have it."

She saw the other's forehead redden strangely. She was expecting some violent remark, but Ruth said nothing. Annette continued on her way, and the other followed her. They descended the stairs. As she reached the street, Annette, turning round, threw a rapid glance towards her defeated rival, and Ruth's dejected air touched her. In spite of her resolution to be hard, she went back and said to her, "I'm sorry. One has to live."

"Oh, I'm quite aware of that," said the other. "Some have all the luck. I never have any."

Her tone had entirely changed. Dejection without animosity. Annette made a movement to take her hand, but Ruth drew back her own.

"Come, don't feel badly! One day one of us loses; another day it will be the other."

"It's every day with me."

Annette recalled their first encounter when Ruth had succeeded in getting the place. Ruth did not reply and walked along dejectedly beside Annette.

"Couldn't I help you?" said Annette.

The blush overspread her forehead again. Wounded pride, emotion? Ruth said dryly, "No!"

"It would give me pleasure to do so," Annette insisted.

And with a familiar gesture she seized her arm. Ruth was surprised and pressed Annette's hand nervously under her arm, and, turning her head, she bit her lip. Then she tore herself away in irritation and walked off.

Annette let her go, following her with her eyes. She understood her: yes, one has no right to offer one's pity to one who does not ask for it.

A few days later, entering a dairy, she saw Ruth making some purchases. She held out her hand to her. This time Ruth took it, but with an icy air. She made an effort, however, to appear less sullen; she uttered a few commonplace words, and Annette, satisfied with this ungenerous advance, replied. The two women discussed the prices of the things they had bought. Annette, though she did not show it, was astonished that Ruth spent more than she on fresh eggs and special milk. Ruth was a little ostentatious in paying in front of her. As they went out, Annette said, "How much it costs to live!" She almost excused herself for the eggs she had bought, saying, "They're for my child."

Ruth, with a lofty air, remarked, "Mine are for my husband."

Annette knew nothing about the other's life. "Is he ill?" she asked.

"No, but he is very delicate."

She spoke proudly of the care that his health required. Annette, who knew how touchy Ruth was, did not ask her any questions, but waited for her to speak. Ruth said

nothing more and they were about to separate when Annette remembered. . . . She offered Ruth a job—the revision of some work by a foreigner—which had been offered to her and which she did not have time to undertake. Ruth at once showed the liveliest gratitude: money played in her life a capital rôle. Annette asked for her address in case she had other orders to pass on to her. Ruth hesitated and replied evasively.

"It's only to be of service to you," said Annette impatiently. "In any case, I live myself—" And she gave her address.

Ruth reluctantly gave her own. Annette felt rebuffed and decided to think no more about her.

But Ruth came and looked her up a few weeks later. She excused herself for having seemed so unfriendly. And this time she confided to her a little, not much, about her life. Born of a family of rich farmers, she had quarrelled with her father because she had wanted to come to Paris and teach. Her father had wounded her pride and she had sworn never to accept anything from him. She wanted to earn her own living. She had worn herself out. In spite of her energy, thinking was too much for her; she labored at her books like an animal at the plough; the blood swelled her temples; she was obliged to stop in a state of congestion. An incipient neurasthenia forced her to give up the examinations she was just ready to pass. She fell back upon giving private lessons. She was succeeding, with difficulty, in earning her living when she fell in love with a man whom she married and who became simply one burden the more. But this she did not say; Annette learned it elsewhere. She was acute enough to divine a part of the truth in the course of the discreet questions she asked her new friend. She saw that the

husband had no occupation: he was an "intellectual," an "artist," a "writer." And she did not have to go very far to find what he wrote. Verses! . . .

Ruth had no more taste than any other little provincial soul. But the poetry overawed her.

She was in no haste to introduce her "artist." She kept him at home. But from this time forward she saw Annette more often—too often. She ended by overwhelming her with testimonials of friendship, flowers, attentions that were seldom very well inspired and only irritated Annette. She had no middle way: it was all or nothing with this passionate soul. She had never had a woman friend; she had never confided in anyone. From the moment when she made up her mind to like Annette she monopolized her. Annette was bored to death by this affection, and she realized that the husband would not find it easy to bear.

At last she succeeded in surprising and catching a glimpse of the precious bird: a dull, insignificant man with vague blue eyes who gave the impression that he was a secret devotee of absinthe. Very vain and far from sure of himself, utterly mediocre, he was anxious for Annette's good opinion. He did not love his wife, but he found it convenient to be pampered by her and assumed languishing, piteous, sad airs in the name of his health, his unrecognized talents and the envy of his fellow-writers. Annette pierced him through and through with her clear eyes. He was cautious with her and moderated the jeremiads for which the silent irony of his listener was waiting. But Ruth swallowed everything whole; she was incapable of judging and as proud as Artaban. . . . "Let her keep her illusions. She needs some one to love, a man to protect. She has a passionately domestic soul. She

would lie down under his feet. . . ." But sometimes she quarrelled with him bitterly. Once, as Annette was climbing the stairs, she heard the "poet" bawling and whining. Ruth was slapping her husband.

Annette no longer had any doubt that the best part of Ruth's money was spent for José's loafing and absinthe. He played the races also. Ruth never complained: she struggled to save up enough for him to publish a volume of his poems. But he was in no hurry to write them. And when, one day, she went over her accounts she discovered that he had stolen three-quarters of the money: he had robbed himself!

That day, with her pride utterly broken, she confessed her misery to Annette. She would not have spoken if it had concerned herself alone. But for years she had been wearing herself out for him—"for his glory," as she said. And he had destroyed it himself!

One confidence leads to another. Annette ended by learning almost all of Ruth's sufferings. Her health was ruined. She was growing weaker every day and less able to restrain her thoughts. As death approached her eyes were opened and she realized the inanity of this man and his lack of affection. José was hardly ever at home any more. He would steal away, finding no pleasure in the society of a sick, disappointed wife.

When her last days came, Ruth had no illusions left. She declared, however, with sincere pride, that she regretted nothing and that she would do it all over again.

"*That* has killed me. But I have lived by it."

She did not believe in anything; she expected nothing, either in this world or in the other. . . .

Annette was alone with her when she lay on her deathbed. A hemorrhage of the brain had struck her down.

José, who had fled at the approach of death, showed his timorous face a few moments afterwards. He had a brief moment of feeling. After he had wept, his first words were, "But what in heaven's name is to become of me?"

"You'll find someone else to support you," said Annette.

He threw her a spiteful glance. And he let Annette pay the funeral expenses.

"There you are!" Annette thought, by the bedside of the dead woman. "She was a tower of pride, will, ascetic devotion. . . . What good did it all do? What a mess! Giving oneself to a dog! Poor Ruth was hard. She was not hard enough. One must be harder still."

XXXV

Reaction against the deception of the heart—my accursed heart which is only there to delude me. My head and my senses will and know. My heart is blind. It is my business to direct it. Reaction against love, and against sacrifice, and against goodness.

In everyone's life, as in the life of society, there are phases of feeling that succeed one another without resembling one another. Their first law, indeed, is not to resemble one another. While one phase is in the ascendant, everyone shares in it with complete seriousness, feeling nothing but contempt for the ridiculousness of the phases that have passed out of date and convinced that his phase is and will always be the best. . . . Annette passed in this way through a phase of hardness.

But whatever one's garment may be, the human being remains the same. One cannot get along without others.

The proudest needs his share of affection; and the more circumstances oblige one to shut oneself in, the more one's treacherous mind conspires to betray one.

Annette felt very strong. Strong in her experience and her intelligence, firm, practical, disillusioned. She was sure now that she could live by her will—of course, by working, but the work too was her will. She did not fear any lack of this. She did not need anyone's help. Nor was she going to put herself out either to please or to displease.

She had found herself in competition lately with a new kind of rival, men. She gave lessons to boys to prepare them for school and examinations. She was successful, but along with her success came the increasing animosity of those to whom she was preferred. They considered themselves thwarted. There was no question of gallantry any more. The most destitute of consideration were the married men: their wives spurred them on. They slandered Annette: what would they not insinuate in regard to the means by which she managed to reach the best places? Annette, with her hard, attractive smile on her lips, followed her own road, scornful of public opinion.

At bottom, however, there was the invisible stamp of the wear and tear exacted by these long years of merciless toil. Her fortieth year was approaching. Life had passed and she had not realized it. An obscure feeling of revolt was rising within her. All this lost life, this life without love, without action, without luxury, without any rich joy. . . . And all that she had missed she had been so completely fitted to enjoy!

What was the use of thinking of it? It was too late now!

Too late?

SUMMER

PART THREE

XXXVI

OLANGE had the small, well-rounded, rustic face of a Gothic Madonna, an oldish, infantile air, laughing, wrinkled eyes, a pretty nose, a delicate mouth, a rather heavy chin, fine skin and a ruddy complexion. She liked to discuss serious thoughts in a serious tone, very serious, contrasting comically with her kind, humorous face, which tried hard not to be so; but her words hurried along for fear of losing the thread of her sober ideas; and sometimes she actually did stop in mid-course with a void in her mind: "What was it I meant to say?"

Her auditors seldom whispered a reply, for they scarcely listened to her. But she did not irritate them, for Solange was not one of those people who hold forth and insist upon your following their insipid discourse. She had no pride and was ready to apologize affectionately for having bored you. But incapable as she was by nature of grasping an idea, she had a naïve aspiration for thought and an immense good will. Nothing very much came of it: her thoughts never quite arrived. The grave books, Plato, Guyau, Fouillée, yawned at the same page for weeks or months; and the great, beautiful projects, idealistic, altruistic—works of social aid or new systems of education—were intellectual toys that she soon forgot in their corners and under the furniture till the next chance brought them to her attention again. A good little bourgeoise, gentle, amiable, pretty, sensible, well-balanced,

with a dash of pedantry, unconstrained, droll, who, without posing, imagined that she had intellectual needs and really had to talk about the ideal and many other things, all on the same plane, calm, tidy, well-dressed, polite, innocent and a nobody.

Younger than Annette by three or four years, she had once felt for her one of those paradoxical attractions that harmless natures feel for those that are dangerous. It is true that these phenomena usually manifest themselves at a distance. In fact, she had approached Annette very little at school, where they were in different classes. It was only because she saw her as she came and went and had picked up some echoes from the older girls that little Solange had conceived for her elder a timid fascination. Annette had had no suspicion of it; and since then Solange had completely forgotten her. She had married, and she was happy. Not to have been happy, she would have had to have a monster for a husband—or a passionate man. Victor Mouton-Chevallier was, heaven be praised, neither one nor the other. A sculptor by vocation, he was not tormented by inspiration, for he had an income and a rich placidity. He had no lack of taste, but he felt no pressing need of translating into his art anything different from what had already been done by this, that or the other of his illustrious confrères of all ages. And as he was innocent of ambition, as he was free from illiberal feelings (from others too, perhaps), he enjoyed an unmixed satisfaction in finding himself so well, so completely, expressed—at least, so he flattered himself in believing—by Michael Angelo, by Rodin, by Bourdelle, or by the smaller gentry; for he was eclectic and found his good things everywhere. In this happy state he would certainly not have made the effort to produce anything him-

self if this had not added to his pleasure one savor the more: the flattering illusion that he belonged to the family. He was willing to accept the tender respect that he felt called upon to show for the heroes of art and their misfortunes. He shared in these latter—from afar; and he forced his jovial face to assume an air of austere melancholy as he listened to his wife discreetly playing the Sonata Pathétique on the piano—for Beethoven also belonged to the family. Solange had fully responded to his domestic needs. A tranquil affection, an easy kindness, a gentle, uniform, complacent humor, an indoor idealism that did not risk itself outside when it was windy or muddy, a propensity for admiring that renders life so much more comfortable!—in short, in a word that says everything, *security* was their true unconfessed ideal. Their circumstances, both of fortune and of heart, permitted them to have this. They were sheltered from material cares, and there was no fear that they would introduce trouble into their household.

But they did introduce Annette. If they had known the elements this Frau Sorge carried within her, they would have been dreadfully upset. But they did not know. They were like innocent children playing with an explosive; they would have had an attack of nerves if they had guessed what they held in their hands. But guessing nothing, after having their own sport, they went and laid it down gently, without intending any harm, in the garden of a friend. . . . They laid Annette down in the garden of the Villards.

XXXVII

When Solange discovered Annette again, she also discovered in herself once more the old feeling she had had for her: she fell in love with her. Like everyone else, she knew about Annette's "irregular" life. But in her goodness—a goodness without depth, but also without prudery—she did not think any the worse of her. It must be said that she did not understand it very well. With her indulgent disposition, which was the most sympathetic side of her amiable nature, she supposed that Annette had undoubtedly been victimized, or perhaps that she had had her own serious reason for acting as she had done. In any case, it concerned only herself; and she was indignant at public opinion. After seeing her friend again, she made inquiries about her and learned of her courage and self-abnegation; she conceived the most exaggerated admiration for her. This was one of those periodic infatuations that left her, for a time, no room for any other feeling. Her husband, whom she fed with her enthusiasms, found in this one an opportunity for melting over Annette's nobility of heart, and that of his wife, and his own as well. (Is there anything that enables us to enjoy our own moral beauty more than to be stirred by that of a fellow-creature?) Husband and wife tried to outbid each other in their noble intentions towards Annette. They could not leave her alone, destitute of sympathy, that poor woman, the victim of social injustice! The Mouton-Chevalliers set out to find Annette, climbing all the way up to her fifth floor. They surprised her in the act of doing her housework. This struck them as all the more touching; and her coldness seemed

to them an admirable dignity. They did not leave till they had won Annette's promise to come and dine with them with her little boy, *en famille*, the following evening.

Annette was not very much pleased by this renewed friendship. She saw how insipid it was. Her years of moral solitude had given her a savage instinct. It was not good to avoid people too much; one found it hard to get into touch with them again; one became aware of an odor of corruption under the flowers. In the quiet household of the Mouton-Chevalliers, Annette was not at her ease; their conjugal happiness did not make her envious. "Too mild, too mild, too mild!" as somebody says in Molière. "No, thank you! Not for me!". . . She had reached a time when she needed the harsh winds of life. . . .

Well, she ought to have been satisfied! The mild Solange was going to see that she got them.

XXXVIII

Annette was dressing to go out to dinner. This evening she was to meet at the Mouton-Chevalliers those friends of whom she was sick of hearing from Solange—Doctor Villard, a fashionable surgeon with a rather garish reputation, and his brilliant young wife. She was troubled. "What if I shouldn't go?" She half thought of sending a line to excuse herself. But Marc, who was bored with being alone with his mother, was delighted at any pretext for going out. Annette did not want to deprive him of this distraction. Besides, she knew she was absurd. "What's the matter? What's troubling you?". . . It

was like a presentiment of evil. . . . Silly! The rational spirit that dwelt in her, side by side with the instincts that took no account of it, made her shrug her shoulders. She finished her toilet and, taking her son's arm, set out for Solange's.

The superstitious instinct was not long in taking its revenge. It is no miracle, indeed, when a presentiment is realized. A presentiment is a predisposition towards what one is afraid of feeling. Consequently, if it comes to pass, there is nothing magical about it. It is a sort of divining-rod; as it approaches a spring, a shiver warns it that the water is eating its way under the surface.

On the threshold of the drawing-room, Annette felt the warning; but she knit her brows, and as soon as she entered the room she was reassured. Even before Solange had presented him to her, she had made up her mind at a glance about Philippe Villard: he was antipathetic to her. She had a feeling of relief.

Philippe was not handsome. He was small, thick-set, with a brow that bulged above the eyes, a strong jaw, a short, pointed beard, a steely blue glance. Very much master of himself, he was cold in a courteous, commanding way. Seated beside Annette at table, he followed two conversations: the general discussion that Solange was carrying on in her desultory manner and that which, in the intervals, he held with his neighbor. In both he had the same brief, precise, trenchant way of talking. Never a hesitation, either for a word or an idea. The more Annette listened, the more hostile she felt towards him. She replied, concealing herself under a rather dry and distant indifference. He did not seem to attach great importance to what she said. No doubt he was judging her from the silly eulogies he had heard from Solange. He

was barely polite. This did not surprise anyone: they were used to his abrupt ways. But it irritated Annette to have to endure them. She observed him beside her, without appearing to see him, feature by feature; and she could find nothing about him that pleased her. But the total impression was not the total of her impressions of details; and when, without difficulty, she reached the end of her examination, she felt uneasy again. A movement of the hand, a wrinkling of the face. . . . She was afraid of him. And she thought, "Above everything in the world, he mustn't see into me!"

Solange spoke of an author who, she said, had the gift of tears.

"A pretty gift!" said Philippe. "Tears in life are not worth much. But in art I know nothing more disgusting than to collect them in a bottle."

The ladies cried out at this. Madame Villard said that tears were one of the pleasures of life, and Solange said they were an ornament of the soul.

"Well, how about you, don't you protest?" he asked Annette. "Do you too get your supplies from the property-man?"

"I have enough of my own," she said. "I have no need of other people's."

"You live on your capital?"

"Can you suggest any way for me to get rid of them?"

"Be hard!"

"I'm learning," she replied.

He threw her a brief sidelong glance.

The others continued to unbosom themselves.

"Look over there," said Philippe to Annette. "There's a good chap who ought to be taught it."

With a corner of his eye he indicated Marc, whose

mobile face was naïvely betraying the various emotions which the pretty Madame Villard, sitting beside him, stirred in him.

"I'm afraid," said Annette, "that he already has too much of a tendency that way."

"All the better!"

"All the better for those who meet him along the way?"

"Let him walk over them!"

"That's easy for you to say."

"You have only to step aside yourself."

"That would be against nature."

"Oh, no, the thing that's against nature is to love too much."

"One's own child?"

"Anyone, one's own child especially."

"He needs me."

"Look at him! Is he thinking of you? He would disown you for a crumb from my wife's hand."

Annette's fingers clenched on the tablecloth. . . . Ah, how she hated him! . . . He had seen her fingers. "I didn't create him just to give him up."

"You didn't create him at all," he replied. "Nature created him. She uses you and casts you aside afterward."

"I shall not let myself be cast aside."

"A battle, then?"

"A battle!"

He looked her in the face, "You will be beaten," he said.

"I know it. One always is. But what's the difference? One fights just the same."

Under the cold mask her eyes smiled defiantly. But the blue gaze of the other penetrated her like a stab. She had given herself away.

Philippe was a forceful man. His force was part of his genius. He carried it as much into his clinic, in his terrible diagnostics and the sureness of his hand, into the operating-room, as into the acts of his life and his decisions. Accustomed to reading at a glance the depths of human bodies, he had understood Annette completely at once—Annette, her passions, her pride and her troubles, her temperament and her strong nature. And Annette felt that she had been caught. With her helmet fallen so soon, her visor broken, furiously angry, she betrayed henceforth to the eyes of her adversary only an icy armor. In the constriction at her heart, she knew now that the enemy had come. The enemy? Yes, love. . . . (Ah, that insipid word, so far from the cruel force itself! . . .) To the sudden awakening of interest which she had perceived in him, she opposed an ironical inflexibility that very inadequately concealed the hostility she felt. It only completed her self-betrayal. She was too genuine, too passionate. She could not pretend. Her very animosity revealed the depths of her being. Philippe was the only one to see this. He did not attempt to revive the conversation again; he had learned enough, and, with a detached air, recounting to the company one of those bitter, amusing stories that were stamped with his own harsh experience, he measured with his eye the woman he intended to capture.

None of the others who were present had observed anything. The Mouton-Chevalliers were regretfully convinced that Annette and Philippe were unsympathetic to each other: between their two characters there was nothing in common. However, in bringing Annette and the Villards together, they had hoped that Annette and Mme. Villard would become friends. "They were made for

each other." And so far as that was concerned, they had the pleasure of seeing that they were not mistaken.

Noémi Villard was a delightful Creole, with small bones, plump flesh gilded like a roast pigeon, the eyes of a roe, a fine nose, spare cheeks, a prominent little mouth that always seemed to be ready to snap something up; round, innocent, youthful breasts, generously revealed, frail arms, a slender waist, small feet, delicate legs. She played the part of a child-woman, with her infatuations, her languors, her enthusiasms, her laughs and tears and lisping words. She seemed to be a fragile creature, expansive, sensitive, not too intelligent. In reality she was just the opposite. With plenty of brains, sensual, dry and passionate, observing everything, calculating everything, unwearіable, unbreakable, fragile, yes, like a willow that bends and—bing!—comes lashing back, made of solid cement under the friable enamel. She alone could have told how much energy this delicate enamel cost. As for intelligence, she had enough of it and to spare: she kept it in the bank, but she utilized it only for the object that interested her, her husband, whom she held jealously. Theirs had been, on both sides, a passionate marriage of the head and the senses—passionate in its pleasures and its vanity. Noémi's decision had long preceded Philippe's choice, and even his attention. This man who, after the example of his illustrious Parisian confrères, carried on with equal ardor his crushing professional activity and a ceaseless social life, had found the time to indulge in many love-affairs. His triumphant reputation had had a good deal to do with Noémi's mad love and her determined desire to capture him, for herself alone, and keep him. Philippe cared nothing about intelligence in women. He wanted them to be well-made, healthy, ele-

gant and stupid. He went so far as to say that a woman could never be stupid enough. Noémi certainly was not, but that made no difference. A woman who desires a man can assume, before her mirror, the mind as well as the eyes that he likes. She intoxicated Philippe with her youthful body and her idolatry. She absorbed him greedily.

But the career of a mistress is not a sinecure. It requires the expenditure of a kind of genius. And there is never a moment of rest! After a long period of mutual amorous servitude Philippe was beginning to grow weary. Noémi, marvellously prompt in perceiving in the heart of her husband-lover the least signs of a veering of the wind, slept with one eye open; always jealously on the watch, while Philippe was unaware of it, she was able to turn danger aside with one stroke and entrap again, by the allurement of the senses and her subtle wit, the man who was about to escape her. It was a game at first, but not for long. Still more than Philippe she had to watch herself, to be always attentive, always ready to ward off the unexpected ravages of the perfidious minutes, the infallible ravages of the days and the years. Noémi no longer had all her first freshness; her complexion was mottled; the fineness of her face was turning to dryness, her throat was growing heavy, and the pure cords of her neck were menaced. Art flew to the aid of the endangered masterpiece and even added a few additional charms. But what tension this always meant! The least moment of abandon would have betrayed the secret to the keen eye of the master, who would not have forgotten it. Never to allow oneself to be taken unawares! . . . What a tragedy one morning when one of the little upper incisors broke! Noémi had remained half the day invisible at the

dentist's, for if, on her return, Philippe had not seen her exhibit her impeccable smile, he would have had suspicions into which jealousy did not enter. (Though even jealousy is less terrible than a broken tooth!) She had to play a fast game. Philippe was not one of those husbands whom one can easily deceive in regard to the quality of one's physical wares. He belonged to that trade himself. Noémi always felt her heart beat a little when he turned on her one of those "X-Ray" glances (as she called them, laughing, to put him on the wrong scent) with which he made her undergo a visit of inspection. "Does he see?" she would wonder. He saw, but he did not show it. Noémi's art seemed to him a part of nature; and so long as the effect pleased him everything went well. But look out for the day when the effect might fail! . . . She could not sleep two nights running on her laurels. She had to win them anew every morrow morning. And she was not permitted to appear anxious. To please the master she had to seem always gay, young, radiant. It was crushing at times. In moments of weariness, when she knew she was not being seen, she slid down in the hollow of a divan, with a hard wrinkle between her eyes, a shrivelled smile, her carmine lips bleeding. . . . But the attack of weakness never lasted more than a minute or two. She had to set out again. And she did set out. Young, gay, radiant. . . . Why not? She was so. And she did not slacken. . . . Besides, there are ways of avenging oneself against a tyrant whom one cannot do without and who abuses one. Enough! She had her secrets. . . . We shall speak of them presently if she is willing. For the moment she laughs, not merely with her lips; she is satisfied with herself and with him, she is sure, she has kept him! . . .

And naturally this is the hour when he escapes from her. . . . In vain all her talent! All this trouble in vain! There always comes a moment when the attention is relaxed. Even Argus slept. And the caged animal, the heart of the chambered lover, regains its liberty.

Through one of those aberrations to which nature is accustomed, which the good mediator finds to her advantage, Noémi, for once, saw a woman without distrust. And that woman was Annette.

She was relying on the deceptive assurance that Philippe abhorred intellectual women. Annette was the last one to cause her any uneasiness. From the physical portrait of her rivals in the past, from her own portrait, Noémi had made an image of the woman who might steal her husband away from her. She saw her as small, like herself, rather dark, pretty, of course, delicately made, coquettish, knowing how to make the best of her advantages. Philippe professed the humorous opinion that woman, being exclusively made for the service of man, should, in modern life, be an extremely finished drawing-room trinket, but one that was easy to handle—that, without taking up too much space, she should agreeably furnish the drawing-room and bedroom. He did not like large women and valued grace more highly than beauty. As for the qualities of the mind, he said that, when he needed them, he found them in men, and that the only mind he demanded of a woman was the "mind of the body." Noémi did not contradict him in this: she corresponded with the portrait. Annette did not correspond with it at all. Large and strong, with a heavy beauty, in repose, when nothing animated her, and (when she did not wish to have it) without grace. A Juno-heifer slumbering in a meadow—so Noémi judged her reassuringly;

and the fact that Annette appeared so frigid with Philippe made her attractive. On her side, Annette, who was very susceptible to prettiness in women, and inclined to like what did not resemble herself, was charmed by Noémi; in talking with her she showed that she too, when she wished, had an enchanting smile. Philippe lost nothing of this; and his new-born flame blazed up for this Annette with her two masks, one of which was not for him. (Wasn't it for him? The love one repulses has such clever ways of re-entering the place from which it has been expelled!) At the same time that Annette was preventing Philippe from scrutinizing her mind and intrenching herself behind her most unattractive manner, she was not displeased that he should see her most captivating expression over the wall. . . . Yes, he had seen it clearly. From the opposite corner of the drawing-room, as he was describing to his hosts some recent experience, he observed his wife, who was working for him unawares. Annette and Noémi were lavishing on each other all the little graces with which Noémi was always well supplied, inspiring in Annette a complex feeling from which the uneasy thought of Philippe was not absent. And her ear followed, from the opposite corner of the room, the decisive voice that knew it was being listened to.

She hated him, she hated him. . . . He represented the deepest part of her repressed nature, the nature she wished to repress, the good and the bad, the hard, commanding pride, the need of dominating, the demands of the will, those of the intelligence, of a sensual, violent body, passion without love, stronger than love. And as she hated this faun of the soul, hated it in herself, she hated it in him. But this was to engage in an unequal combat. There were two against her—he and her own self.

XXXIX

Philippe Villard came from the small, independent merchant class.

His father, a printer in a little town, active, bustling, bold, had at once the energy and the freedom from scruple that are necessary for success on a vaster scene; but he did not succeed, because for success there is a line of audacity that one must be able to reach and not go beyond, and he had always gone beyond it. Managing a local newspaper that swam on the troubled waters of politics, a Gambettist republican, a tireless anti-clerical, a great hand at elections, he once exceeded the limits of libel and blackmailing that are authorized by the law (no, by custom!) and was condemned and dropped by those whom he had served. Ill in addition, he saw that he was ruined; his plant was sold and all the local hatreds were unmuzzled, now that he no longer had the means to make himself useful or feared. He fought furiously, like a wolf, against illness, poverty and misfortune. The exasperation made his condition worse, and he died, expressing with his last breath his implacable bitterness against the treason of his old companions. The son was ten years old; and none of these imprecations was lost on him.

His mother, a proud peasant woman from the slopes of the Jura mountains, accustomed to struggling with an ungrateful soil that was bitten by a harsh wind, went out by the day as a washerwoman in the canal and undertook the roughest work. She was as strong as a Percheron mare, attacking her work with her four limbs and her iron frame, greedy for gain, but painstaking, honest, hard on

herself and close-fisted; she was feared and sought after; she had a redoubtable tongue, which she restrained, and people knew that, through her husband's death, she was the mistress of many family secrets. She made no use of these, but she possessed them, and it was more prudent to pay for her services than to do without them. She had no intellectual scruples and was rigorously active, rather sombre (for in this race Spain has left its blood), with a limitless passion of energy which, mingled with Gallic disillusionment, believes in nothing and yet acts as if salvation or damnation were awaiting it. She loved nothing but her son. She was ferocious in her love. She did not conceal from him any of the things about which she held her tongue with other people; she treated him as a partner. Ambitious for him alone, she sacrificed herself, and he was going to sacrifice himself—for whom? For *her* revenge. (*Hers?* Yes, her own, that of the son, that of the mother—all the same thing!) No tenderness, no indulgence—above all, no whimpering. "Go without things! You will gloat over it later." When he came home from school—heaven knew by what efforts of work and diplomacy she obtained for him a scholarship in the town grammar-school, then at the lycée in the county-town!—when he came home, thrashed and humiliated by the little bourgeois boys, the fool-hardy heirs of the hidden spite of their fathers, she said to him, "You will be stronger than they are later. They will kiss your feet. Rely on yourself! Don't rely on anyone else!"

He did not rely on anyone else, and he soon made it clear that they would have to reckon with him. She succeeded in clinging to life until her son's studies were brilliantly finished and he had taken his first term in medicine in Paris. He was in the midst of an examination

when she had to take to her bed with an inflammation of the chest. She did not want to disturb him before he had finished. She died without him. In her rude handwriting, twisted like the claws of the vine in spring, with all the dots and accents well marked and in their places, she wrote to him on a blank sheet carefully cut from a letter from her son, who was reckless with his paper, "I am going. My boy, keep strong. Do not give way."

He had not given way. Returning to the country to bury his mother, he found a small sum of money, collected from day to day, which enabled him to pay his way for another year. Then, thrown upon himself, he spent half his days and sometimes his nights earning what the other half demanded for his subsistence. No task was too much for him. He worked at natural history for a taxidermist, he served as a sculptor's model, as an extra boy on Sundays in suburban cafés, or on Saturday nights at wedding-parties in restaurants. In winter, when he was hungry one morning, he even took a job under the sewerage commission in a gang of snow-sweepers. He did not hesitate to have recourse to bold-faced begging, to charity societies, to accepting humiliating loans which he could not pay back and which gave mean souls the right to treat him without consideration for a five-franc piece. . . . (The blackguards! They didn't try it again after the look he gave them! But then, since they could not repay themselves with scorn, they did so with hatred, prudently behind his back: they slandered him.) During a few months of desperate labor, he went so far as to accept the money that a girl of the neighborhood offered him. He did not blush at this, for it was not for himself (he was killing himself with privations), it was for his success. Of course he had needs! He wanted to take everything, but he re-

pressed his desire. Later on! He must conquer first. And to conquer he must live. Live by every means. Victory cleanses everything. And it was his due. He felt he was a genius.

He attracted the attention of his masters, his comrades. He was given work to do that was signed by men at the top after they had made a pretence of touching it up a little. He allowed himself to be exploited so as to acquire a hold over those who barred the gates to newcomers. They were in no great hurry to let him in. They respected him, and respect is a kind of money that enables one to dispense with other kinds. They appreciated him, oh, yes. But he did not grow fat on this. In spite of his native strength, the strength of his mother's Jura mountains, he was on the point of going under from fatigue and malnutrition when Solange happened upon him. It was at one of those many charities which she patronized with a sincere though intermittent generosity, with her heart and her money; a children's clinic. Solange saw Philippe there, devoting himself with a rage—that rage he felt to conquer, whenever there was the least chance of it—at the beds of the little patients who were apparently doomed. He spent nights there and came away from these battles looking worn and debilitated, but with eyes flaming with fever and genius. When he had conquered he was almost handsome and seemed more than good as he sat by the little sufferer whom he had just saved. Did he love him? It was possible, not certain. But he had got the best of the disease.

Solange, when she saw Philippe's situation, passed through one of those periodical crises of "patheticness" in which her whole horizon was filled by a single object. Whoever wished to profit by this had to lose no time.

Philippe did not lose it. This drowning man grasped the hand that was held out to him. He even took the arm with it, and he would have taken the rest if he had not perceived that Solange, in her infatuation, had no thought of an amorous relation. She loved to feel exalted, but this in no way disturbed her tranquillity. Philippe had never seen a woman who was interested in him without being in pursuit of some interest of her own. The good Solange found her pleasure in herself. All she asked of others was that they should not gainsay the image she had formed of them. At heart she did not really want to know them. She took pains not to see anything in the other person that might displease her, saying to herself that this was not his "real nature"; and she accepted as real only what resembled herself. Thus she succeeded in creating in her own mind a whole universe composed of good, comfortable souls after her own pattern. Philippe let her go her own way with a little contempt and a little respect. He did not like stupid people; and he regarded as such those who did not see the world as it was; but a goodness that does the good of which it speaks was for him no everyday spectacle. Whatever their value might be, moral or immoral, the essential thing was that such people counted. Solange's goodness was not fictitious. Since she had become aware of Philippe's destitution and toil, she gave him a pension till he finished his years of study; she provided him with leisure so that he might work in peace. She did more: she made use of her extensive relations to interest one of the influential masters of the Faculty in him, or rather, since this cautious man had not failed to observe the restless power of the hungry young wolf, to so arrange things that his interest should not remain confined *intus et in cute*, but should

show itself in the open. In the end she brought him into touch with an American oil-king who wanted to immortalize himself vicariously and opened for him a rapid path to fame. He laid the foundation of this across the ocean by his audacious feats of surgery in a palatial hospital founded by this Pharaoh.

During the course of these trying years, however, Solange would sometimes totally forget her protégé for months, and as a result of her carelessness the promised pension would cease to come. With all their good will, the rich cannot understand that some people have to think of money all the time. Money is a constant anxiety with the poor. Solange would send Philippe tickets to concerts. Philippe had to swallow all his pride to remind this charming woman, in her box at the theatre, of the unpaid pension. He swallowed it. It was sometimes the only nutriment he had taken during the day. On these occasions Solange would open her big, surprised eyes: "What's that. . . . Ah, my dear friend, how astonished I am! The moment I get home . . ."

She would promise, forget it again for a day or two and finally send it, excusing herself as gracefully as possible. Philippe, maddened by the delay and the humiliation, would swear that the next time he would die rather than ask for it again. But dying is not good for people who feel the necessity of living! And he felt this necessity. . . . He would ask for it again as often as he was obliged to do so. . . . Solange was never put out with him. If she often forgot—she had "so much to think of!"—when he reminded her of it she always took the same pleasure in giving.

How strange was the relation between this man, young, ardent, hungry for all the good things of the earth, and

this woman, scarcely older than himself, elegant, pretty, gentle, good enough to eat, who, as the years passed, were often alone together, without any hint of anything equivocal in their friendship! The calm Solange maternally advised Philippe about his clothes, about the little problems of society and the practical life. Philippe's pride was not ashamed to accept this, to ask advice and even make her his confidante, to tell her of his ambitions and his disappointments. He could do so without fear. Solange would hear nothing that was evil, nothing that was real. What did it matter? She listened, and she said afterwards, with her kind smile, "You want to frighten me, but I don't believe you."

For she only believed what was not true.

And this man, pitiless to everything that was mediocre, made only one exception in life: for Solange. He abstained from judging her.

Preceded by a reputation of the American kind, flashy, but substantial, and based on indisputable realities, he had come back to Paris seven or eight years before. The support of his patron, bringing official favor with it in the wake of his insolent dollars, had opened a way for him in spite of the triple barriers piled up by routine, jealousy and the just rights of those who had been long awaiting their turn to enter. Whether it was just or not, he was advanced over them all. Philippe had not permitted himself to accept any honors or advantages he had not deserved; but, knowing that he deserved them, he did not trouble himself about the means by which he got them. He despised men too much not to borrow their own contemptible weapons, when it was necessary, in order to get the better of them. He did not despise a newspaper puff that pierced people's ears like the brass instruments that

used to accompany the village tooth-pullers on their platforms. He was a great man for fashionable exhibitions, first nights, varnishing-days, official galas. He lent himself to sensational interviews. He himself wrote—one is never served better than by oneself—and, through one or two examples, showed those who contradicted him that he could handle the pen as well as the knife. A counsel for amateurs! . . . Never be ambiguous! His way of holding out his hand meant, "Alliance or war?" He allowed no means to escape him by being neutral.

At the same time, a habit of working desperately, with no more consideration for himself than he had for others, an indifference to risks, brilliant results that could not be denied, made the internes in the hospital he directed his enthusiastic partisans. He indulged in rash communications to the Academy that aroused the exasperated incredulity of comfortably settled souls who did not like to be turned upside down: Homeric jousts from which he almost always emerged with the decisive word and always with the last one.

He terrified the timid. He had no regard for individuals when the interests of science or humanity seemed to him at stake. He would have liked to experiment on criminals, destroy monsters, sterilize the abnormal, undertake heroic operations on living subjects. He loathed sentimentality. He did not give way to sympathy with his patients, and he did not allow them to pity themselves. Their groans had no interest for him. But when he was able to save them he did save them—harshly; he cut down to the quick to cure the living man. He was hard of heart, but his hands were gentle. People were afraid of him and they pursued him. He fleeced the rich and asked nothing of the poor.

He lived in a large way, for he had acquired the taste for luxury. He could give it up, however, on a day's notice; but, leading this life, he led it whole-heartedly. His wife was part of his luxury. He enjoyed them both and he never demanded of them anything they could not give. He did not ask Noémi to share in his intellectual life; he did not give her a chance to do so. Noémi did not care; if she had the rest, she had, as she thought, the important part. He had made up his mind that in any case this was all that women ought to have. A woman who thought was a cumbersome bit of furniture.

Why, then, was he so immediately captivated by Annette?

Through that which resembled himself. Through the quality in the Annette of this period that was like himself, the quality he alone could perceive. At the first crossing of their glances, as their first responses struck, steel against steel, he said to himself, "She sees these people as I see them. She's one of my kind."

Of his kind? It scarcely seemed so, to judge by the facts. Annette had fallen out of the social sphere into which Philippe had succeeded in elbowing himself, and they had met each other, in passing, on one of the rungs of the ladder. But at this particular moment they were on an equal footing, they both felt that they were strangers in this world, adversaries of this world, that they both really belonged to another race, once mistress of the soil, but now dispossessed, scattered over the earth and almost vanished. After all, who knows the mysteries of races and their vicissitudes, that mingling of all, in the ultimate future towards which, as it seems, humanity is moving for the final triumph of mediocrity? . . . But it has its unexpected resurgences, and sometimes the former master

of the soil resumes his estate for a day. Whether it was his estate or not, Philippe claimed it as his own. And in this way he had just appropriated Annette.

XL

When Annette returned to her apartment again, with lowered head, heavy with thought, she went to bed without speaking. She tried to make her mind a blank, but she could not sleep. She had to struggle to escape from a certain mental picture, for the moment she became drowsy the picture appeared at the door of her imagination. To forget it she tried to fix her mind on her everyday affairs: they did not interest her. Then she appealed against the threatening invasion to an ally whom she usually feared to invoke, because by doing so she ran the risk of stirring up too many past troubles: Julien and the world of thoughts, more fictitious than real, which her regrets and dreams had grouped about the beloved name. They returned for a moment and fell back again, frozen. She persisted in trying to grasp them by force. She held in her arms only withered sheaves. A hot sun had dried up their sap. In her desire to revive them Annette, with her feverish hands, only burned them up. She was agitated, turning and turning her pillow. But she had to sleep for the sake of tomorrow's work. She took a sleeping-powder and fell into oblivion. But when she awoke after three or four hours, her anxiety was still there. It seemed to her that even during her sleep it had not left her.

During the next day and the days that followed her anxiety persisted. She came and went, gave her lessons,

talked, laughed as usual. The well-equipped machine went on of itself. But her soul was troubled.

One grey day, as she was crossing Paris, everything suddenly became bright. On the other side of the street Philippe Villard was passing. She went home filled with joy.

When she made up her mind to get to the bottom of this joy she was thunderstruck. It was as if she had discovered a cancer in herself. . . . So once more she had been caught in the trap. Love? Love for a man who could only be for her another cause for useless suffering, a man whom she was sure was dangerous, heartless, a man who could not belong to her, who belonged to someone else, a man she could not love because she loved someone else. Someone else? Yes, yes, she still loved Julien. Well, if she loved him, how was it possible for her to love another man? She did love him. . . . But how, how could her heart give itself to two persons at once? Give itself wholly to each without dividing itself? For when she gave her heart Annette gave it completely. . . . She had a feeling that she was prostituting herself. To be sure, to surrender her body would have seemed to her less shameful than to surrender her heart to two loves at once. Wasn't she sincere, loyal to herself? . . . Of course she was. She did not know that she had more than one heart, that she was more than one being. In the forest of a soul there co-exist thickets of thoughts, jungles of desire, twenty different essences. Ordinarily one does not distinguish them: they are asleep. But when the wind passes over them their branches dash against one another. . . . The clash of passions had long since stirred this multiplicity to life in Annette. She was at once a dutiful and a passionately proud woman, a passionate

mother, a passionate mistress. Mistress? Mistresses? The forest in the wind with its branches flung out toward all the points of heaven. . . . Annette, humiliated by the oppression of the force that was disposing of her without her consent, thought: "What is the use of willing and struggling for years if one moment is enough to ruin everything? Where does this force come from?"

For she repudiated it, furiously, as something alien. Didn't she recognize it as of her own substance? Ah, that was even more overwhelming. How escape from herself?

She was not the sort of woman who yields passively to an inner fatality that she despised. She determined to stifle a feeling that mortified her. And with the help of her work she would have succeeded had it not been for Noémi.

She received a letter in the large handwriting of this little person who, although she had made a study of worldly elegance, was unable to disguise the cold resolution that lay behind it. A few friendly lines inviting her to dinner. Annette excused herself because of her work. Noémi repeated the invitation, expressing this time the warm desire she felt to see her again and leaving her to choose the evening. Annette, determined not to risk a danger of which she had become aware, declined the invitation again, pleading her extreme fatigue at the end of her days. She thought the matter was settled, but the little Pandarus, who, when he is bored and malicious, is one of the thousand forms of love, left Noémi no peace until she had introduced Annette into her sheepfold. And one evening when Annette, returned from her lessons, was preparing dinner—the hour that idle people always choose to make their calls—who should appear but Noémi,

chirping, assuring her of her eternal friendship. While Annette, embarrassed at appearing at such a disadvantage, was beguiled by the affectionate manner of this woman in whom she unconsciously loved the reflection of "the other one," she held her ground, in spite of Noémi's entreaties, and absolutely refused to dine with her. But she could not do less than promise to return her call, carefully making sure of the hours when she would be certain to find Noémi alone. Noémi perceived how anxious Annette was to avoid Philippe; she put it down to timidity and a lack of sympathy with him. Her own sympathy increased. When she was at home again she indiscreetly poured out to Philippe an account of her call, dwelling, with the charming perfidy of the best of friends, upon everything which, to her mind, might tend to depreciate a woman in Philippe's eyes: the poverty, the disorder, the odor of ink and cooking—in a word, Annette in the kitchen. Philippe, who knew all about Annette's gallant history and who knew still better the odor of poverty, made other reflections than those he was expected to make, but he kept them to himself.

It was not altogether by chance that Annette, a few days later, as she was coming out of Noémi's house, met Philippe in the street on his way home. As she had not expected to meet him, she felt she had a right not to combat the secret joy that ran through her. They exchanged a few words. While they stopped to talk, a young woman passed to whom Philippe bowed. Annette recognized her. She was the intelligent actress who was playing Maslova just then. Annette was attracted to her, and this attraction was evident in her look. Philippe asked: "Do you know her?"

"I have seen her," she said, "in *Resurrection*."

"Ah," he replied, with a contemptuous curve of his mouth.

"Don't you like her acting?"

"Her acting isn't the point."

"Is it the play then? You don't like it?"

"No," said Philippe. And seeing that Annette was curious to know his reasons, he added, "Let's walk a little way together, shall we? It's rather unconventional, but conventions were not made for us."

They walked along together. Annette was embarrassed and flattered. Philippe talked about the play with a mixture of hostility and humor such as Tolstoy himself —it was a fair enough turn of the wheel—had often employed in regard to people he did not like. He interrupted himself, amused at his severity, "I am not fair. . . . When I see a play I see those who are watching it. I see under their membranes, and the spectacle is not beautiful."

"It is with some people," said Annette.

"Yes, there are some people who have the gift of making the misery of the world seem beautiful. This saves them the trouble of remedying it. These good idealists manage to have many a sweet hour with the misfortunes of others. They serve them as a means for artistic or charitable emotions of the most tranquillizing kind, but they are of even more service to the villains who exploit them. Their sentimentality flies its protecting flag over patriotic leagues, leagues for repopulation, the founding of missions, colonial wars and other philanthropies. . . . The epoch of the teary eye! . . . There is no eye that is colder and more self-interested! The epoch of the kind employer—you have read Pierre Hamp?—who builds a church, a slaughter-house, a hospital and a brothel

near his factory! Their lives are divided into two parts: one consists of talking about civilization, progress, democracy, the other of the sordid exploitation and destruction of the whole future of the world, the corruption of the race, the annihilation of the other races of Asia and Africa. . . . After this they go and melt with emotion over Maslova and take their afternoon nap to the soft harmonies of Debussy. . . . Look out when the awakening comes! Ferocious hatreds are piling up. The catastrophe is coming. . . . So much the better! All their dirty medicine does is to keep diseases going. Some day they will have to come to surgery."

"Will the patient recover?"

"I take away the disease. The patient has to take his chance!"

A joke. Annette smiled. Philippe threw her a sidelong glance. "It doesn't frighten you?"

"I am not ill," said Annette.

He stopped and looked at her. "No, you are not. In your presence one breathes the fragrance of health. It frees me from my physical and moral infections. The latter are the worst. Excuse my diatribe! But I've come from a meeting, a dispute with a gang of hypocrites over the official support of disease—that is, over hygiene. I was furious and suffocating with disgust, and when I saw you with your clear eyes, walking along so freely, with everything about you so proud and wholesome, I selfishly drank in a whiff of your air. There! It's better now. Thank you."

"So I'm promoted to the rank of a doctor. And after what you have just been saying about them?"

"Doctor, no. Medicine. Oxygen."

"You have a direct way with people!"

"This is the way I class them: inspiration, expiration, those who bring you to life and those who kill you, whom you must kill."

"Whom do you want to kill now?"

"Now?" He took her up. "Don't you think I have enough to do with my patients?"

"No, no, I couldn't help saying that," replied Annette, laughing. "It was my old classic blood. . . . But may I ask you with whom you were angry when I met you?"

"I should so much like to forget it, now that I'm with you. To put it briefly, it was about a block of unsanitary houses that has been a breeding-ground for cancer and tuberculosis ever since the time of Henry IV. The finished product: eighty per cent infected during the last twenty years. I had brought the matter before the sanitary board and demanded radical measures, that the buildings should be expropriated and torn down. They seemed to agree with me and asked me to draw up a report. I drew up the report, went back and found that the oracles had changed their minds. . . . "An impressive report, dear and eminent colleague, a fine document. We must think it over. We must look into this. There is no doubt that these people have died, but were their deaths really due to the houses they lived in? . . ." One of them brings me some certificates (manufactured how?) proving, with the complicity of various families who had been bribed by the owner, that one man had already bought his ticket to the cemetery when he came and settled in the waiting-room, that in another case the cancer was the result of an accident. Another contests the idea that old houses are less sanitary than new ones and says they are larger and more airy; he gives his own as an example. . . . We must make things sanitary, not destroy. Mod-

eration in all things. A good cleaning will be enough; the owner promises to have them disinfected. . . . Besides, we are poor, our pockets are empty, we haven't the money to expropriate them. . . . Ah! if it were a question of making a new gun! . . . But, after all, cancer kills more surely than a gun. . . . To finish the farce, one of the augurs ended by talking about beauty. It seems that since these buildings belonged to the period of Henry IV, they ought to be preserved for the sake of history and art. . . . I am fond of art myself, and I can show you some pictures in my own house, ancient and modern both; but age (unless we are talking about beautiful Madame So-and-So) is not the mark of beauty; and, beautiful or not, I shall never admit that the past should poison the present. Of all hypocrisies, the æsthetic hypocrisy revolts me the most, for it tries to create nobility out of its own barrenness. So I said some pretty stiff things on that score. . . . In the middle of the discussion a colleague motioned to me, drew me aside and said, 'Don't you know that that old beetle who feeds on the corpses of his tenants is an intimate friend of the president of that great committee of commerce and food-supply which brings about elections and coalitions, one of those grizzled dignitaries who rule over our democratic banquets and conventions, the invisible man out of whom the rabble constructs the tottering masonry—freemasonry—of our Republic? This friend of the people doesn't want to have the people turned out of their tomb . . . because, and this is the best of all . . . because of his philanthropy. . . .' At the end they hand me a petition from the tenants, drawn up in fine style, protesting against this desire to turn them out of their quarters! What do you expect me to do against all these people? The augurs laugh, they say. So

I laughed. But I added that one shouldn't keep a good joke to oneself, that I was not an egoist, and that I intended to share it tomorrow with the readers of the *Matin*. They cried out at this, but I shall do as I said. I know what to expect; every knife will be raised against me. . . . The disciples of Hippocrates, to whom I've just given a good drubbing, will miss no chance. They have their own way of getting back at me. But, as you say, 'War,' my Lady Warrior! How about the other evening at Solange's? All this seems to amuse you?"

"Yes, it's splendid. I like this, fighting against injustice. I should have liked to be a man."

"There is no need to be a man. You have done your share. . . ."

"I have never complained of my share in the struggle. It's only the suffocation. Our lot is to fight in a cave, but you fight in the open air, on a mountain-top."

"Ah! that quivering of the nostrils! A horse sniffing the powder. I've seen that already. I noticed it the other evening."

"You laughed at me the other evening."

"Not at all. It was too much like myself for me to laugh."

"You harassed me; you started me off."

"Yes, I saw it at once. . . . I wasn't mistaken. . . ."

"Just the same, you were contemptuous enough in the beginning."

"How the devil could I have expected to find you, to find *you* at Solange's house?"

"Well, but what about yourself? Why were you there?"

"It's another matter with me."

"A liking for sentimentality?"

"It's your turn to tease. . . . Poor Solange! . . . No, don't let's talk about her. I know everything that can be said. But Solange is taboo."

She did not question him, but she looked at him.

"I'll tell you some other time. . . . Yes, I owe her a great deal."

They had come to a stop. They were about to separate. Annette smiled. "You are not as bad as you seem."

"And perhaps you're not as good!"

"That makes an average."

He looked her directly in the eyes. "Will you?"

He was no longer joking. The blood streamed into Annette's cheeks, and she could not find a way to reply. Philippe's eyes held her and would not let her go. Was he saying something? Was he not saying anything? On his lips she read, "I want you."

He bowed and went on.

XLI

Annette remained alone in a torrent of flame. She walked straight ahead and ten minutes later she found herself at the point from which she had started. Without realizing it, she had made the complete circuit of the iron fence of the Luxembourg Gardens. She came to herself to find that she was all on fire, with the three flaming words engraved on a black background. She made an effort to efface them. Had he uttered them? . . . She saw again the impassive face, she tried to disbelieve it. But the imprint was there, and her resistance weakened and suddenly gave way. Well, it was decreed. . . . She knew it in advance. . . . Instead of revolting, as she

would have thought of doing an hour before, she felt relieved. The die was cast. . . .

She went home with her mind clear, no longer feverish. She had decided. She knew that whatever Philippe wished he would do, and what Philippe wished she wished also. She was free, nothing held her back. . . . The thought of Noémi? She owed her only one thing, the truth. She would not lie. She would take what belonged to her. . . . What belonged to her? The other woman's husband. . . . But blind passion whispered to her that Noémi had stolen him from her.

She did nothing to hasten the inevitable. She was sure that Philippe would come. She waited.

He came. He had chosen the hour when he knew that she would be alone.

As she went to open the door she was seized with terror. But it had to be as it was. She opened the door, revealing nothing of what she felt, unless her paleness did so. He entered the room. They remained standing before each other, a few steps apart, their heads lowered; then he looked at her with his serious eyes. After a silence he said, "I love you, Rivière."

And this name of Rivière in his mouth brought up the image of a stream of water.

Annette, trembling, motionless, replied, "I don't know whether I love you. I don't think I do, but I know that I am yours."

The gleam of a smile passed over Philippe's grave face. "Good," he said. "You don't lie. Neither do I."

He took a step towards her. She drew back instinctively and found herself leaning against the wall of the room, defenceless, the palms of her hands pressed out behind her, and her legs gave way beneath her. He had

stopped and he looked at her. "Don't be afraid," he said. There was something tender in his hard look.

Like a captive who accepts her fate calmly, she said, with a shadow of scorn, "What do you want of me? Is it my body you want? I will not dispute with you over that. Is that the only thing you want?"

He took another step and sat down on a low chair at her feet. His cheek brushed her dress. He took Annette's hand, which she limply abandoned to him. He breathed in its fragrance, passed his lips over the fingertips and, bending down, placed it on his head, on his eyes. "This is what I want."

Under her fingers, Annette felt the rough, bushy hair, the swelling of the forehead and the beating temples. This imperious man was placing himself under her protection. She leaned towards him and he raised his face. It was their first kiss.

His arms encircled Annette, who had dropped on her knees beside him and no longer resisted, as if she had no breath left, and Philippe, violent as he was, had no thought of taking advantage of his victory. "I want everything," he said, "all of you, mistress, friend, companion—my woman altogether."

Annette extricated herself. Noémi's image had risen before her. A moment before it had been she who had driven her from her consciousness. But that Philippe should do the same thing wounded her in a way, wounded her in that instinctive freemasonry of women who, even as enemies, find themselves leagued against the aggressiveness of man—one body in common.

"You cannot," said Annette. "You belong to another."

He shrugged his shoulders. "There's nothing of me that she possesses."

"She has your name and your faith."

"What does the name matter? You have the rest."

"I don't care about the name, but I must have your faith. I give it and I ask for it."

"I am ready to give it to you."

But Annette, who had asked for it, felt a certain revolt when it was offered to her. "No! no! Do you mean to take it away from her who has shared your life for years and give it to me whom you have only seen three times?"

"It has not required three times for me to see you."

"You don't know me."

"I do know you. I have learned to see into life quickly. Life goes by and no moment ever appears twice. You must make up your mind on the spot or you can never make it up. You are passing, Rivière, and if I do not take you I lose you. I take you."

"You may be making a mistake."

"Perhaps. I know that when one makes a decision one often makes a mistake. But in not deciding one always makes a mistake. I should never forgive myself the error of having seen you without determining to possess you."

"What do you know about me?"

"More than you think. I know that you have been rich and that you are poor, that you had a youth filled with all the pleasures of wealth and that you were ruined and cast out of your world, that you have struggled and not weakened. I know what your struggle has been, for I underwent it myself, every day, for thirty years of my life, a hand-to-hand struggle, and twenty times I was on the point of giving in. You have held out. As for me, I was used to it. I have known abject poverty from the cradle. You had a thin skin, and you were pampered and made much of. You did not yield. You have never ac-

cepted any shameful compromise. You never tried to escape the struggle by any feminine means, seduction or the honest expedient of a marriage for money."

"Do you imagine it has been offered to me so many times?"

"That is because they knew very well, even the meanest of them, that you are not a person to be bought by contract."

"Inalienable, yes."

"I know that after having loved and had a child you refused to be the wife of your child's father. I do not need to know the reasons of your heart. But I do know that in the face of a cowardly society, you dared to demand, not the right to enjoy, but the right to suffer, the right to have a son and bring him up, in your poverty, alone. It was nothing to have demanded this right, but you have exercised it, all by yourself, for thirteen years. And knowing, through my own experience, what these thirteen years mean in suffering and daily effort, I see you before me, intact, straight, proud, without a trace of wear and tear. You have escaped two defeats, that of failure and that of bitterness . . . I myself have not escaped the mark of the latter. . . . I am a connoisseur of the battle of life. I know what the quality of a character like yours is worth. That serious smile, those clear eyes, the calm line of the lids, the loyalty of those hands, that tranquil harmony—and, under it all, the burning fire, the joyous thrill of the struggle, even if one is beaten. (It doesn't seem to matter! One goes on fighting . . .) Do you suppose that a man like myself does not know the value of a woman like you? Or that, knowing it, he should not be ready for anything to win it? . . . Rivière, I want you. I need you. Listen! I am not trying to deceive

you. Although I desire your good, I do not want you for your own good, but for my own. I am not offering you any advantages, only more ordeals. . . . You don't know about my life. . . . Sit down here beside me, my beauty of the eyebrows!"

Seated on the floor, she raised her eyes to his. He held her two hands in a firm clasp while he talked to her. "I have a name, I have success, I have money and everything it gives. But you don't know how I got them or how I keep them. I took them by force and I hold them by force. I compelled my fate, if there is a fate. I succeeded in spite of things and in spite of men. And I have never tried, or desired, to win forgiveness for my success by bandaging the wounded self-esteem and the interests that have been trampled upon as I passed. My dear colleagues expect that success at least will have its narcotic effect upon me. There hasn't been any such effect. They have tried in vain to flatter me; they feel that I am not and never will be one of them. I can't forget what I have seen on the other side of the fence, the innumerable rascalities and iniquities. I have had time to meditate on the social lies for which the best watchdog has always been the intellectual class, in spite of what it pretends and what people expect from it. Apart from a few knowing fellows who, where their art and thought are in question, have the reputation of respecting nothing, but who, outside their own bailiwick, tip their hats very politely to the reigning imbecility. I have had the conspicuous folly never to pay court to it. At this very moment I am planning an attack upon some of their sacred impostures, impostures that condemn thousands of beings to poverty and endless misery. I am going to make the three heads of Cerberus howl, the three hypoc-

risies of morality, patriotism and religion. I shall tell you all about it later. I shall be beaten, too, I know. But I shall fight on just the same, for the joy of it, for the difficulty, and because it has to be done. . . . You see why your words, the other evening, brought me a message you never foresaw. Your words are mine. The mouth ought to be mine."

Annette gave it to him. He took her forehead and her cheeks tenderly in his strong hands. "Rivière, I need you. I never expected to find you. Now that I have you I shall hold you."

"Hold me firmly! I am afraid I may escape."

"I know how to keep you. I offer you my hard life, my enemies, my dangers."

"Yes, you know me. But none of this can be mine. It is not yours to dispose of. It belongs to your Noémi."

"What would she do with it? She doesn't want to know anything about it. She ignores all truth, everything that is painful in life."

Annette looked at Philippe, and he read in her eyes the question she withheld.

"You are thinking, 'Why did he marry her, then?' The woman lies, yes, I know it. Her whole body is a lie, from the roots of her hair to the tips of her nails. Well, the odd thing is that I took her for that very reason. It is almost the reason why I love her. When falsehood is as perfect an art as that it deserves a good theatre. . . . (Don't we know that the theatre, that almost all art, lies, except in the case of a few freaks who bewilder their confrères; then the confrères say that they are not artists, that they ruin the trade.) If the world is a lie, at least we have the right to demand that the lie shall be pleasant. Everything considered, I prefer for my satisfaction and

my society those who lie prettily. They don't take me in. I see through them. Noémi's grace is as artificial as her sentiments. But she makes a success of it. She does me credit. I enjoy it when I come home in the evening with my eyes befouled by the cutting up of spoiled meat. She is like laughing water. I bathe in it. Let her lie! It is of no importance. If she spoke the truth she would have nothing to say."

"You are hard. She loves you."

"No doubt, and I love her too."

"If you love her, why do you need me?"

"I love her in her own way."

"That's a great deal."

"A great deal for her, perhaps. It's not much for me."

"But can I give you what she gives you?"

"You are not a toy."

"I should like to be a toy, too. Life is a game."

"Yes, but you believe in it. You are one of those players who take the game seriously."

"So are you."

"Because I wish to do so."

"How do you know that I too don't wish to do so?"

"Well, let's wish together!"

"I don't want a happiness that is built on ruins. I have suffered. I don't want to cause suffering."

"All life is bought with suffering. Every happiness in nature is built upon ruins. In the end everything is ruined. At least we can have built something!"

"I can't make up my mind to sacrifice another person. Poor little Noémi!"

"She would have less pity if she had you under her feet."

"I suppose so. But she loves you, and to me it is a crime to kill a love."

"Whether you wished it or not, it's done now. Your presence has killed it."

"You think of nothing but yourself."

"No one thinks of anything but himself in love."

"No, no, that's not true. I think of myself, of you, of the woman who loves you, of everything that you love and everything that I love. I should like my love to be good and full of joy for everyone."

"Love is a duel. If you look to the right or the left you are lost. Look straight before you into your adversary's eyes."

"My adversary?"

"I."

"You are indeed, but I don't fear you. But Noémi is not my adversary. She has done me no harm. Can I come into her life and destroy it?"

"Would it be better to lie to her?"

"Deceive her? Far better to destroy her! . . . Or destroy me. Renounce."

"You will not renounce."

"How do you know?"

"Women like you never renounce through weakness."

"Why shouldn't it be through strength?"

"I will not admit that there is any strength in abdicating. I love you and you love me. I defy you to renounce."

"Don't defy me!"

"You love me."

"I love you."

"Well?"

"Well, what you say is true, I can't, I can't renounce."

"Then?"

"Then so be it!"

XLII

They had not yet said anything to the "other woman."

Annette had sworn to herself that she would not belong to Philippe till he had spoken to Noémi. But the strength of passion had been too much for her resolution. No one appoints the hour for passion. It seizes its own. And now it was Annette who restrained Philippe. She dreaded his implacability.

Philippe would not have scrupled to leave Noémi in ignorance. He did not respect her enough to feel that he owed her the truth. But if he was obliged to tell it, he meant to tell it without stopping to consider her. He was a terrible man, terribly without kindness when a passion had seized upon him. Nothing else existed. The love that he had felt for Noémi was that of a master for a valuable slave, and indeed she had never been anything more than this for him. Like many women she had adapted herself to this; when the slave holds the master nothing exceeds her power. She is everything until the day comes when she ceases to be anything. Noémi knew this, but she felt confident in her youth and her charm for many more years. After us the deluge! Besides, she had been on the watch. She had known of Philippe's passing infidelities. She had not attached much importance to them because she had wisely realized that they were momentary. She simply consoled herself with the luxury of small revenges of which she said nothing to him. She had deceived him in a temper on one occasion, one sole occasion when Philippe's unfaithfulness had stung her more than usual. She had enjoyed it very little; she had even been rather disgusted. But no matter, they

were quits. Afterwards she had been more affectionate to her husband than before. It gave her satisfaction to say to herself, as she embraced him, "My dear, I am lying to you. This will teach you! You're it, this time!"

The fear she would have had of Philippe, if he had learned the truth, added to the interest. Philippe knew nothing definite, no facts, but he read the lie in her eyes. Whether Noémi had deceived him or not, he knew she was thinking about it. And she saw a flash pass through his eyes; his hands might have crushed her. But he knew nothing; he would never know anything; she closed her eyes with the languorous air of a dove.

He said brutally, "Look at me."

She had time to assume an innocent expression. He knew it was false—and he did not resist it.

He was not angry with her, but if he had caught her in the act he would have broken her back. He did not expect from her what she could not give him, frankness and faithfulness. Since she pleased him, and as long as she pleased him, all was well. But he considered himself free to break with her when she no longer pleased him.

Annette had more scruples. She was a woman, and she knew better what was going on in Noémi's heart. Noémi might be false and vain and she might deceive Philippe, but she loved him. No, for her it was not just a game, as he had said it was. She was bound to him as if he were a part of her own flesh, not merely by the fiery bond of sensual pleasure, but from the bottom of her heart, for good or evil. Good and evil. In love nothing counts but the strength of love, that imperious magnet that draws soul and body together, one being into another being. She

clung to him as the aim and purpose of her life, as what she had wanted, wanted, wanted through long years. A woman does not always know why she has fallen in love. But because she has fallen in love she cannot liberate herself. She has expended too much of her strength and her desire to be able to transfer them to another object. She lives like a parasite on the being she has chosen. It would be necessary to cut into them both to separate them.

A suspicion began to eat its way into Noémi. A mere nothing, at first, the nibbling of a mouse. There was no change in their life. Philippe, hard as ever, always in a hurry, with little desire to talk, listened to her without hearing her, absorbed, with a flame in his eyes. Just at this time he was deep in a very disagreeable affair, a bitter controversy in which he had involved himself. Noémi knew about it, but the last thing she wanted was to be kept informed of these bothersome matters. When he was in the midst of them he thought of nothing else, and he neglected her. She had only to wait and let him fast; he would come back to her later with more appetite than ever. But he was fasting too long now! At other times she had amused herself by enticing him in a way that moved Philippe to rebuff her, for it annoyed him to be distracted when he was engrossed in something; but although she had protested loudly at his rudeness she had not been angry. She had been like a child playing with a fire-cracker; the more noise it made the more it diverted her. But this time, calamitously, the fire-cracker had not gone off. . . . Noémi's provocations had met with nothing but indifference. Philippe did not even notice them. . . . The mouse of her suspicion went away, came back, took up its abode in her. It nibbled so far that

it reached the quick. There came a day when Noémi cried out.

They were both in bed, one morning, side by side. His eyes were open. She had just awakened, but she pretended to be asleep and she watched him. Instinctively she felt that the reflection of another face was passing over this one. (For, unaware of it as we may be, the outer casing of the mind is moulded by the image that dwells in it.) Her jealous attention was instantly caught. From under her lowered lids her eyes pierced him like a gimlet as she lay there, motionless, continuing to breathe regularly as if she were sleeping; she keenly studied this man who was so far away, so near, this man who belonged to her, this eternal stranger whose thigh was touching her own and between whom and herself lay an impassable world. No, she was not mistaken, there was some other anxiety in his mind aside from his ideas. . . . Anxiety? . . . She saw him smile. He was thinking of another woman. To snatch him away from this phantom, to test her own power, she groaned as if she was dreaming and rolled over against him. He drew away from this body that was seeking him, assured himself that she was asleep, rose noiselessly, dressed and went out. She had not moved. . . . But the door was not closed before she sat up in bed with her face distorted. She beat her breasts with her little fists, stifling a cry of rage and anguish.

From this moment she was a huntress. Tense, quivering, she looked about, she sought the scent. The nails of her clenched hands hurt her; she was burning to tear the enemy to pieces. . . . Oh, silently, gently. . . . To tear the woman's heart out. . . . But she could not find this heart. Where was it hidden? She beat the woods, explored with feverish minuteness the circle of his ac-

quaintances. With her painted, youthful smile hiding her sharp teeth, she did not miss the least alteration of Philippe's face in the presence of the other sex, while she watched the hands, the eyes, the vocal inflections of every one of them, while the hunting-dogs that she carried in her heart were constantly casting about for the scent. . . . But the trail was always false and the animal escaped.

The strange aberration persisted which, from the beginning, had led her to place Annette outside the field of her suspicions. For weeks she had forgotten her. Annette never appeared. She felt guilty and, far from being proud, she was humiliated at the thought of Noémi because of her secret victory, her stolen victory. She avoided any reappearance at the Villards' house, and she would have found plenty of excuses if Noémi had expressed any desire to see her again. But Noémi expressed nothing of the kind; she had too much on her mind to remember Annette.

She had tried in vain to convince herself that Philippe's caprice would pass. But, far from passing, the all too evident symptoms of his disaffection became even more marked: a cold inattention to what she said and how she looked, to the very presence of his little wife, at times a complete indifference—even when Noémi tried to force the fact of her existence upon him, a bored weariness, an unconcealed disgust that avoided any importunate contact. . . . She quivered with rage and slighted love! . . . She could not hide from herself any longer the seriousness of this misfortune. She became frantic. But she was careful always to force herself not to show it. . . . Always, always to be gay, sure of herself and of him, always to keep offering him the bait which he would not even look at! She was eating her heart out. . . . And

against this intangible enemy there rose within her a furious hatred. Unable as she was to lay hold of her, she could have beaten her own head against the wall. She had watched everyone, everyone, in vain—everyone but Annette. Annette was the last person she would have thought of.

And it was Annette who betrayed herself.

She was walking along the street when, twenty steps away, she saw Noémi coming towards her. Noémi did not see her. She was walking with her eyes empty, her head bent; her pretty face was pale and looked older and careworn. She was not conscious of herself at this moment or of anything about her; for days she had been like a monomaniac who, with a dejected rage, turns the grindstone of a fixed idea. Annette was shocked at the sight of her. She might have passed close beside her without being noticed, or have retraced her steps, but in her clumsy haste she left the sidewalk and crossed the street. This movement broke the continuous flow of the passing people and mechanically attracted Noémi's attention. She recognized Annette, who was trying to avoid her, and, following her with her eyes, she saw Annette furtively glance at her from the other side of the street and then turn her head away. It was like a blinding light. . . . She was the woman!

She stopped with her heart in her mouth, her nails driven into the palms of her hands, clenching her teeth, bristling like a cat with its back arched; there was murder in her eyes. The look of a passer-by reminded her that she was in a world where people live by falsehood, the world which, for once, she had left. She returned to it. But ten steps farther on she laughed cruelly. She had caught her. . . .

XLIII

Annette had been completely upset by the sight of Noémi. Ever since she had surrendered herself she had been tormented by remorse. Not that she considered herself at fault for loving the man who loved her: their love was true, it was healthy, it was strong. It had no need of excuse or pretence. No social convention weighed in her mind against it. In the fever of her passion she would not even admit that she had any duty towards Noémi. She was Philippe's real wife. She could not recognize the other one who had not been able to share in his work and his struggles and make him happy. But all this assurance did not alter the fact that someone else paid the price of her own happiness, that she had destroyed the happiness of another. She had tried to believe that Noémi was too frivolous to suffer very much and that she would not find it very hard to give him up. But she knew this was not so, and all she could do was to avoid thinking of Noémi. The self-centredness of the first days of passion had made this possible.

But it was no longer possible now that she had met Noémi. Annette had the unfortunate gift of being able to pass outside herself and enter sympathetically, in spite of her own passions, into the passions of others—especially into their sufferings, which a glance revealed to her. . . .

She went home almost as much obsessed as Noémi by the anxiety that was devouring her. She could not satisfy herself with words; she could not fortify herself with the rights of love. Noémi, too, was in love, and Noémi was suffering. Has the love that suffers less rights than the

love that causes the suffering? It is not a question of rights. One of the two must suffer, she or I!

She! Annette's passion left her no choice. . . . But it was far from pleasant.

At least this suffering should not be aggravated! It was wrong to prolong it as they did, to let the wound grow worse without applying a firm hand to it, operating upon it, dressing it. To dodge the frank confession, to throw upon Noémi all the misery of discovering her misfortune, was cowardly and cruel. From the very first day Annette had insisted to Philippe, "I am unwilling to conceal myself." Then how had she allowed herself to slip from day to day into this undignified situation? . . . It was her own faint-heartedness all the time.

"We must speak," she said to Philippe.

But the moment Philippe was willing to speak she prevented him. She was afraid of his brutal frankness. He threw away like a squeezed lemon what he no longer loved. His old bonds annoyed him. "Come," he said, "let's make an end of it."

And Annette replied, "No, no, not today." She saw the suffering he was going to cause. Gracious heavens! How painful a thing it was to destroy a heart!

Philippe had plenty of other things to think about! His days were filled by an implacable warfare against public opinion and a press that was aroused against him. This was no time for Annette to bother him with her own troubles. He was engaged in a perilous campaign. He had taken the initiative in a league for birth-control. He abhorred the shameless hypocrisy of the ruling bourgeoisie who, without the slightest interest in improving the hygiene or alleviating the poverty of the working-classes, were only interested in increasing their numbers, so that

there would be plenty of fodder for factory and cannon. So far as they are concerned, they are careful not to threaten their prosperity and complicate their life by having too many children themselves. But they are not at all disturbed if a badly regulated birth-rate perpetuates poverty, sickness and slavery among the common people. They make a national and religious duty of this. Philippe was well aware of the fury he would arouse, but no danger had ever stopped him. He rushed straight into them, though they were greater than he expected.

He had made himself hated by a multitude: first by his colleagues, the pontiffs, whose vanity, doctrines and interests were wounded, then by the rivals he supplanted and even some of his own adherents, to whom he had not hesitated to tell the unvarnished truth. For he was not the man to exchange easy compliments with people who praised him, and gratitude was the least of his faults. He took what was due to him and he gave only what he thought was deserved—which was not very much. Solange alone excepted, the title of benefactor did not greatly impress him. No favoritism! So he could only expect to be attacked hard and defended weakly. He embarrassed the manœuvres of the profiteers of the ideal. Every time some noble, philanthropic, filibustering scheme was organized, they could be sure that he would place himself in opposition to it. He took a scandalous pleasure in punching the noses of the virtuous at their sly tricks. In this way he had earned in respectable quarters, the (*sotto voce*) reputation of a bad character, a destroyer, an anarchist. These whispers had not yet ventured as far as the public ear—the monstrous ear of *Pasquino,* the slanderous press. They were awaiting the right moment. *Eccolo!* The beautiful occasion had come! . . . It was

an explosion of patriotic anger. All the papers took part in it. The echo of the public indignation reached Parliament, where immortal words were pronounced vindicating the right of the poor to a plentiful family. A few exalted souls proposed a law that would deal rigorously with all propaganda that tended directly or indirectly to reduce the population. The exaggerations of a free-and-easy press, in which the egoism of the pleasure-lover took precedence over all humanitarian reasons, furnished arguments to discredit the cause. Philippe found his adherents among the enemies of society. To every volley he replied straightforwardly himself in one of the great newspapers. But there was danger that this tribune would fail him, for letters of protest flooded the paper. He gave lectures; he spoke at riotous meetings. His vehemence equalled that of his opponents. They were on the watch for some imprudent utterance that would enable them to overpower him. But this formidable wrestler remained the master of his passions and did not allow himself to be carried an inch beyond what he wanted to say. He achieved an enormous notoriety; he was all the rage with some and an object of scorn and hatred to others. He found it easy to breathe in the dust of the combat.

In the midst of this tempest of what account was Noémi?

XLIV

Noémi hastened homewards. She was remembering Philippe's first meeting with Annette, when she had been present—her own stupidity and their treachery. She was

furious. Scarcely had she found herself between the walls of her apartment than she gave way to her rage. It was like a water-spout. In the twinkling of an eye everything was laid waste. Anyone who saw her, weeping, convulsed, would have had difficulty in recognizing her, with her pretty face distorted with anger, biting and tearing her handkerchief, making havoc of the papers on her husband's writing-table, avenging her suffering on the little dog that ran to her to be petted and the paroquet she was ready to strangle. . . . But she had taken care to lock herself in. The rôle of Fury should certainly be played in private. It was not beautifying. It made her look hard, old and worn-out. But to see herself in the mirror, without witnesses, ugly and wicked, did not displease her; it almost gave her comfort. This, too, was a form of vengeance. She began to pity herself and her face, and, distracted from her violence by this compassion, she rolled on the carpet and sobbed loudly. . . . This could not last long, for Philippe would be coming in; she must hurry, take double mouthfuls, weep quickly, weep for all she was worth. . . . She continued to sob in great gusts, but the worst part of the storm was already over. The little dog returned, unresentfully, and licked her ear. She hugged him, moaning, and sitting on the carpet petted one of his feet and fell silent. She was thinking. Suddenly, with her mind made up, she rose to her feet, fastened up the hair that had fallen over her eyes, picked up the objects that were strewn about the room, rearranged the scattered papers, carefully composed her face and her dress. Then she waited.

Philippe found her calm and appreciative. At first she tried the simplest weapons. In the course of their talk she innocently let fall a few offensive words about her

detested rival. In a sweet voice she said two or three atrocious things about Annette—about her outward appearance, of course. The moral question was secondary; even when the spirit is what one loves, it is the body that makes love. Noémi was expert in finding in a woman's beauty the things that make her seem ugly, things which, once they have been seen, cannot be forgotten. This time she surpassed herself. To poison the image of the rival in the eyes of a lover is an inspiring task. . . . Philippe never flinched.

Then she changed her tactics. She defended Annette against various bits of gossip; she praised her virtues. (Eulogies have no consequences!) She tried to make him talk, to make him take off his mask, to open battle with her on the field where she was awaiting him. But Philippe remained as indifferent to the good things she said as to the evil.

She brought into action all her amorous allurements. She tried to arouse Philippe's jealousy; she threatened, laughingly, to pay him back if he ever deceived her and to pay him double. He pleaded a business engagement and got up to go.

Then anger seized her again. She cried out that she knew everything, that he was Annette's lover. She threatened him, upbraided him, besought him, talked about killing herself. He shrugged his shoulders and, turning his back, walked to the door without a word. She ran after him, caught him by the arms, forced him to turn around and, with her face against his, in an altered voice, said, "Philippe! . . . You don't love me any longer. . . ."

He looked her in the eyes and said, "No!" Then he went out.

If Noémi had been distracted, she now became pos-

sessed. For hours her head whirled with insane fury. She thought of every absurd, ferocious means of avenging herself. To kill Philippe. To kill Annette. To kill herself. To dishonor Philippe. To defame Annette. To make Annette suffer. To throw vitriol over Annette. . . . What joy to disfigure her! . . . To strike at her through her honor. To strike at her through her child. To write, send anonymous letters. . . . Feverishly she scribbled a few lines, tore them up, began again, tore them up again. . . . She was just as ready to set fire to the house.

But she did not do so. Calming herself gradually, she collected her strength and the true genius of a woman in love came into play.

She saw plainly that she could do nothing with Philippe directly. He would pay her for this some day! . . . But for the moment he was inaccessible. Consequently, she must deal with Annette. . . . She went to see Annette.

She did not know what she was going to do. She was ready for anything. She had taken her revolver in her hand-bag. On the way she rehearsed in her mind scenes that she later discarded. For her instinct led her to foresee Annette's replies and correct her plan in accordance with them. Even at the last moment she changed everything. A flood of rage rose in her as she climbed the stairs, panting, almost running; and through the material of the bag she clenched the weapon in her fist. But when the door opened and she found herself before Annette, she understood at a glance. . . . One gesture, one word of violence, would exasperate Annette, and she would be all the more implacable in following her passion.

All trace of Noémi's anger instantly disappeared. And

red, as if she were out of breath from having climbed the stairs too quickly, she flung herself, laughing, on Annette's neck. Surprised at this outburst, annoyed by this embrace, Annette kept her reserved manner. The other, once in the apartment, walked unceremoniously into the bedroom and rapidly assured herself that Philippe was not there. Then she sat down on the arm of the chair and addressed little, tender words to Annette, who stood stiffly beside her. As she talked she even passed one arm about Annette's waist and played with her collar. Suddenly she burst into tears. . . . At first Annette thought she was still pretending. . . . But, no! This was serious; these were real tears. . . .

"Noémi, what is the matter with you?"

With her face pressed against Annette's breast, she did not answer; she continued to weep. Annette, bending over this great grief, tried to calm her. Finally Noémi raised her head and moaned through her sobs: "Give him back to me."

"Who?" asked Annette, startled.

"You know!"

"But . . ."

"You know, you know! I know you love him and I know he loves you. . . . Why did you take him away from me?"

More tears. Annette, with stricken heart, heard Noémi plaintively recall the confidence, the affection, she had shown her, and she could not answer, for she was reproaching herself; and these sad reproaches, which had no violence in them, struck her heart. But when Noémi said bitterly that Annette had abused her friendship to deceive her, she tried to clear herself, saying that love had come in spite of her and had overpowered her. There was

nothing pleasant for Noémi in these confessions, and she endeavored to turn them aside; she pretended to help Annette to justify herself and seemed to believe that Philippe was chiefly to blame. She spoke of him in the most outrageous way to assuage her own bitterness and make him odious or at least suspect in Annette's eyes. But the latter rose to his defence. She would not allow anyone to accuse Philippe of being the aggressor. He had been frank. She, she alone, had committed the error of not permitting him to confess. Then Noémi, filled with hatred, redoubled her accusations. Annette opposed her. The dispute grew bitter. One would have said that, of the two, Annette was Philippe's real wife. And Noémi seemed suddenly to become aware of this. She lost all her discretion and cried out in a new rage, "I forbid you to speak to him! I forbid you! He is mine."

Annette, shrugging her shoulders, said, "He belongs neither to you nor to me. He belongs to himself."

"He is mine," Noémi repeated passionately. "I shall keep him." She was claiming her rights.

"There are no rights in love," said Annette, harshly.

"He is mine," Noémi cried again. "I shall keep him."

"I am his," Annette replied. "You have kept nothing."

The two women glared at each other with hatred in their eyes, Annette steeled in egoism and hardness, Noémi burning to strike Annette. She hated every inch of her, from her head to her feet. She wanted to insult her ugliness, lash her with the cruellest words, the most irreparable words. It would have been such a satisfaction. But she stopped short; she would have lost too much!

Stooping down quickly to pick up the bag that had fallen at her feet, she pulled out the revolver and turned it . . . against whom? . . . She did not know yet. . . .

Against herself! . . . At first it was a feint, but when Annette flung herself upon her to seize her arm what had been pretence became real. The two women struggled; Noémi fell upon her knees with Annette bending over her. It was not easy to restrain the desperate little creature. She really meant to kill herself now. . . . Although, if the weapon had touched Annette's bosom, with what delight she would have fired at her. . . . But Annette struck her hand aside, the gun went off, the bullet lodged in the wall. And Noémi never knew which of the two she had aimed at. . . .

She had dropped the weapon and she struggled no more. The nervous reaction had set in. She fell now, sobbing and prostrated, at Annette's feet: she was in hysterics. From the first Annette had suspected intuitively that Noémi was acting a part . . . up to a certain point. (But does one ever know just to what point?) And she had been dully irritated by this nonsense about suicide. . . . But how could she doubt the suffering of this poor little broken thing? She struggled to remain hard, to turn away, but she could not; she was ashamed of her suspicions and, with her heart full of pity, she knelt down by Noémi, lifted up her head, tried to console her, saying maternally, "My child. . . . Come, come! . . ."

She took her in her strong arms and raised her up. She felt this young body, shaken by sobs, abandoning itself, defenceless, and she thought, "Is it possible that I am the one who causes this suffering?"

Another voice said to her, "Would you not buy your love at the cost of any amount of suffering?"

"My own suffering, yes."

"Your own and other people's. Why should the others be privileged?"

She looked at Noémi as she held her, half-fainting. . . . So light! . . . A bird! . . . It seemed to her that she was her daughter and, without quite meaning to do so, she pressed her in her arms. Noémi opened her eyes and Annette thought, "If she were in my place would she spare me?"

But Noémi turned towards her a broken look. Annette laid her in her *chaise longue,* and, standing beside her, placed her hand on her head. (Noémi shivered at the hateful contact, but she did not show it.) She asked her, as if she were addressing a weeping child, "So you love him very much?"

"I love nothing but him."

"I, too, love him."

Noémi gave a jealous start. "Oh," she said harshly, "but I am young. You, you" (she hesitated), "you have had your life, you can get on without him."

Annette repeated to herself, bitterly, the words she had not uttered: "It is because I shall soon be old that I cling to this last hour of youth, this supreme light, and will not give it up. . . . Ah! If I had the treasure of youth before me as you have!"

But she added, sadly, "I should make a mess of it a second time, I suppose."

Noémi had seen Annette's face darken and she was afraid she had imperilled the frail advantages she had just gained. She said hastily, "I know quite well that he loves you, that you are beautiful"—("Liar!" thought Annette)—"that you are superior to me in many things that he likes. I cannot even hate you because, in spite of everything, I love you"—("Liar! Liar!" repeated Annette)—"The match is not equal. It isn't fair! No . . . I am only a poor, weeping woman. I don't

amount to anything. I know it. . . . But I love him, I love him, I can't live without him. What do you think will become of me if you take him away? Why did he love me once if it was only to abandon me? I can't endure it. He is my whole life. Everything else is nothing to me."

There was nothing false in her tone now, and Annette pitied her again. She was insensible to the rights Noémi invoked over her husband; she did not believe in the rights of one being over another, in these contracts of mutual proprietorship that people sign for life. But she was distressed by these tricks of cruel nature who, when she separates two hearts that have loved each other, never removes love from both hearts at once—no, but rather takes pains that one of the two shall cease to love before the other, so that the most loving is always sacrificed. And it was hateful to her to further the schemes of the great torturer. "Life belongs to the strongest. Yes, love does not hesitate. To attain its end it tramples everything else under foot. Woe to the weak! . . . But why is it that I can't say this? I should like to, but the words stick in my throat, I cannot. It revolts me. Is it because I do not love enough? I am old, as she says. I belong in the ranks of the weak. . . . No! No! No! It's a trick! . . . By what right does she come and step between happiness and me? I will not give up to her my bit of happiness! . . . Her tears, what are her tears to me? . . . I will trample on her!"

But as she looked angrily at Noémi lying there, Noémi, who was watching her through her tears, took the hand, the arm that hung down by the back of the chair, pressed it against her cheek and begged, "Let me keep him!"

Annette tried to free herself. Noémi held her fast.

Rising in her chair, she slid her two hands up Annette's arm, forcing her to bend over and look at her. "Let me keep him!"

Annette snatched herself away from the fingers that gripped her. She rebelled. "No! No! I will not. He needs me."

"He needs nothing but himself," said Noémi, bitterly. "He loves nothing but himself. He finds his pleasure in you as he once found it in me. He will leave you as he left me. He is not attached to anything."

She judged him hardly and profoundly. Annette was struck by her intelligence. With what acuteness, born of bitterness and suffering, had he been read to the depths by this little creature who seemed so frivolous and heedless! Some of her terrible observations corresponded only too well with the apprehensions that her own experiences had awakened in Annette. "And yet you love him?" she said.

"I love him. He does not need me. It is I who need him. . . . Ah! Do you suppose I don't suffer in needing a man who has no need of me, a man who despises me, whom I despise? . . . I do despise him! I despise him! But I can't live without him. . . . Why did I ever know him? It was I who wanted him. I wanted him, I caught him. . . . And I am the one who is caught. If only, if only I had never known him! Ah, but I can't wish that! . . . I haven't the strength. I am too much in love. He holds me completely. I hate him. I hate love. Why, why does one love?"

She stopped, exhausted, with her hunted eyes wandering, seeking to the right, to the left, a way of escape. They bowed their heads, these two women, enslaved under the yoke of the savage force.

Noémi took up her refrain in a dull, heavy tone, "Let me keep him."

Annette felt a will as tenacious and adhesive as a devil-fish clinging to her limbs with its arms covered with suckers. She snatched herself away from it again and cried, "I will not."

There was a flash of anger in Noémi's eyes and her fingers clenched. Then in a soft, plaintive voice, she said, "Love him! Let him love you! But don't take him away from me. Let us both keep him, you and I."

Annette made a gesture of repulsion.

Noémi's fury flashed up again. "Do you think it doesn't disgust me? You disgust me. I detest you. But I don't want to lose him."

Annette moved away from Noémi and said, "I do not detest you. You are suffering and I am suffering. But it is base to divide in love. I am willing to be the victim. I am willing to be the executioner. I am not willing to be base. To save what I love I am not willing to surrender half of it. I give everything. I want everything. Or I want nothing."

Noémi, clenching her teeth, cried from the depths of her heart. "Nothing!" (For even while she was offering to yield a share, she counted on regaining everything.)

Then, with a bound, she rose from her chair, ran to Annette as she stood there, and, falling on her knees, clasped her legs. "Forgive me! I don't know, I don't know what I am asking. I don't know what I want. But I am unhappy. I cannot endure it. . . . What am I to do? Tell me! Help me!"

"Help you! I!" said Annette.

"You. To whom can I go for help? I am alone.

Alone with that man who is not interested in you, even when he loves you, in whom you cannot put any trust. . . . And, before he came, a mother who was interested in nothing but herself, in her pleasures. . . . No one to advise me. . . . I haven't a single friend. . . . When I saw you I thought you would be one. And you have been my worst enemy. . . . Why have you done me this injury?"

Annette was overwhelmed. "My poor child, it wasn't my fault. I didn't wish it. . . ."

Noémi seized upon this compassionate word, "Your child, you said. . . . Yes, be a mother, an older sister to me! Don't hurt me! Advise me. Tell me what I should do. I don't want to lose him. . . . Tell me, tell me. . . . I will do anything you say. . . ."

She was speaking only half falsely. She was so accustomed to shamming what she felt that she felt what she shammed. And her love, her grief, her need of Annette, her hope of touching her, were certainly real. Even this confidence she showed in her—the last card she had to play. She played it with a passion of despair. And even as she unbosomed herself, she did not lose sight of the disquietude that Annette's face could not conceal. Annette was weakening. Noémi's self-abandonment disarmed her. She no longer had the strength to reply. She was not deceived, however. The sugary tone of some of her adversary's inflections threw light on the latter's duplicity. She let her talk. She read her depths. She was thinking, "What shall I do? Sacrifice myself? What a sell! I will not. I don't like this woman. She lies, she hates me. But she is suffering." And she stroked the head of the kneeling enemy, who continued to groan and watch her, following her vacillating will as if it were her prey,

with a shiver of fear, of acute breathless half-sanguinary joy, and who, at the right moments, pressing to her lips those hands that she would gladly have bitten, repeated, tirelessly, "Let me keep him!"

Annette, with lowered brows, wanted to drive her away. She saw in those eyes trickery and grief, falsehood and love, a desperate hope. She smiled with weariness, pity and disgust for herself, for them both—for everything; and, turning aside her head, she said in a moment of weakness, "Keep him!"

No sooner had she said it than she wished to take it back. But Noémi bounded to her feet and embraced Annette with frantic protestations. . . . (She had never hated her so much! At last she had her! . . . Had her?) Annette was already saying, "No, no! . . ."

Noémi pretended not to hear. She called her darling, her best friend. She vowed eternal gratitude, eternal love. She laughed and cried. But she did not waste her time in vain effusions. She wanted to know what Annette would do to get rid of Philippe.

Annette rebelled. "I said nothing."

"You did say it. You did say it. You promised me. . . ."

"A word that escaped me. . . . You dragged it from me by surprise."

"No, you can't take it back. You said 'Keep him.' You said it, Annette. Tell me that you said it! You can't deny it. . . ."

"Leave me, leave me," said Annette, exhausted. "Don't torment me. I can't. I can't."

She sat down, crushed, while Noémi, standing beside her, continued to harass her. Their rôles had changed. Annette refused to give him up; her love had taken root

in her. Noémi did not care about this. Annette could keep her love if she did not keep Philippe. She wanted Annette to break with him at once, without waiting. And she could suggest ways of breaking with him; her head was full of them. She urged her, cajoled her, begged her, tried to force her, embraced her, deafened her with her flow of words; she appealed to her generous heart, besought, adjured, demanded, dictated the replies. . . .

Annette, rigid and frozen, would not say another word. She did not even try to stop this torrent. Her lips were tightly pressed together, her eyes dull. . . . At last Noémi became silent in the face of this immobility. She took her hands—they were cold and damp. "Answer, answer!" she said.

Without looking at her, Annette murmured, "Leave me." (Her voice was so low that Noémi read it on her lips rather than heard it.)

"You want me to go away?" she replied.

Annette nodded.

"I am going, but you have promised?"

Annette repeated wearily, "Leave me, leave me. . . . I need to be alone. . . ."

Noémi hastily rearranged her hair before the mirror. Then, turning towards the door, she said, "Good-bye, you have promised. . . ."

Annette made a final gesture of protest, "No, I have promised nothing."

Noémi felt herself again flooded with anger. After all this effort! But her instinct told her that she must not move too quickly or stretch the cord too tight. . . . All the same, the blow had its effect. She left.

She had seen the weakness of the enemy. She would trample on her.

XLV

Annette remained for some time motionless in the spot where Noémi had left her. She was exhausted after this long scene. She would have resisted better if the attack had not surprised her at a moment when she was already shaken by the double wear and tear of passion and incessant work, the uninterrupted fever aroused in her stormy soul by her participation in Philippe's struggles, the repressed remorse, the anguish that was concealed beneath her exhaustion of mind and body. This weakness gave Noémi her strength. She found the field prepared and an ally in her adversary.

Noémi herself played little part in Annette's anxieties. She cared little for her as a woman. As a rival she did not care about her at all. She considered her false, perfidious, heartless, and with jealous injustice she now denied what she had at first enjoyed, her charm. Everything about her seemed factitious except her grief. Besides, it mattered very little whether it was Noémi or someone else. . . . "She is a living creature who suffers, and I, I cause this suffering. . . ." And a strange pity preyed upon Annette's heart.

This tendency had developed, during the last few years, from the sight of so much misery, from her connection with those two deaths, Odette's and Ruth's. She had been mysteriously shaken by them. A weakness. She called it unhealthy and perhaps it was so. One could not live if one had to pause over the sufferings of the world. All happiness is nourished on the unhappiness of someone else. Life devours life, as larvæ devour the living prey in which they are laid. And everyone drinks the blood

of all. . . . Annette had once drunk it without thinking of it, and this blood brought warmth and joy to her body. While she was young she had never thought of the victims. From the moment when she had said to herself, as she thought of them, "I must be hard," she had begun to weaken. She felt this; she could only be hard intermittently now. She was growing old. Ten years earlier she would not have had a moment's hesitation because of the harm she was doing Noémi. "My happiness is my right. Woe to anyone who touches it! . . ." She would have had no need to seek for pretexts. Now, in order to snatch from life her share of happiness, she had to find other reasons than her happiness. She was no longer sufficient unto herself. She had found the strength to brush aside, without scruple, the other less fortunate competitors in the hunt for bread. This bread was her son's; she was upheld by the animal instinct that makes a creature bristle to defend its young and feed them on the flesh of its fellow-animals. But the other animal instinct, the love of self—taking and keeping for oneself—was dying down and only asserted itself now by fits and starts. Maternity, by usurping the place of this other instinct, had partially destroyed it.

In the present crisis her son was no help to her. Far from it! He was one anxiety and remorse the more. Annette could not lie to herself, her passion took no account of her son. She felt guilty towards him, and she had taken pains to hide everything from him. She knew the child. In the past she had observed the jealousy that led him to drive his claws into those whom she loved. She did not blame him for this. She was glad that he wanted to be the only one to love her. . . . But today she was defending her treasure—against whom? Against her

treasure! Passion against passion. She did not wish to sacrifice either of the two. And as both of them were jealous, obstinate, domineering, she had to hide from each the secret of the other. Had she succeeded? Marc detested the "other fellow." He knew nothing—of that she was sure—but although he did not know, had not his instinct told him? She was ashamed to conceal herself and she was even more ashamed that he might suspect. . . . No, he suspected nothing; it was for other reasons that he hated Philippe. . . .

As for Philippe himself, he did not do Marc the honor of thinking about him at all. In marrying Annette he would have been quite willing to take two or three brats into the bargain. It made no difference to him either in his feelings or financially; there was no need to be grateful to him for it. He did not dislike Marc; he thought him fairly bright, rather lazy, not very keen; he might have subjected him to a sharp discipline, but he felt no need to concern himself with the child, and he made this plain. He had a way of talking of him, a rough humor that wounded Annette to the quick. Accustomed to the coarse things of life, he had no idea of the consideration that a proud, sensitive nature demands, of the things that offend its sense of decency. In the bluntest, rudest terms he would give the boy, in his mother's presence, harsh warnings and medical advice that made both the child and the mother blush. The mother more than the child. Philippe's theory was that nothing must be concealed from the boy. This was also Annette's theory. And Marc's as well. But there are ways of putting things! Annette suffered in her very flesh. Marc, who was humiliated, stored up the bitterest resentment. Between him and Philippe there never could be anything but misunderstanding.

Their two temperaments were too different. Annette could foresee the clashes, the endless discords. A terrible thought for her, the passionate lover and mother!

There was no one to whom she could turn for help in making up her mind. She had to decide alone, egoistically. Well, didn't she have the right to think of herself too? A right is nothing if one does not maintain it. Was she maintaining hers? . . . Yes, at moments, like a lioness, when she saw youth, happiness, life about to be swallowed up. . . . Happiness? . . . There was no question of happiness in a union with a man like Philippe! Something less or something more, incomparably more for a woman like Annette: a full, bold, intelligent life, not a life of repose slumbering in its security, but great winds, storms, action, struggles—with the world—with him—a life of trouble and fatigue—but together—life—a life worthy of being lived, with death at the end, when one was worn-out and happy to leave the hard, fertile days behind, happy to have had them. . . . That was glorious! But one must have the strength. . . . She had it, enough to carry the burden, once it was well adjusted, with her head up, to the end. But in order to adjust it she had to be helped and even forced a little. Philippe must place the burden on her head, impose it on her. He must say, "Carry it! For me! You are necessary to me. . . ." With these words she could surmount all her remorse. . . . Was she necessary to Philippe? He had said so during the first days when he had wanted to win her. He no longer said it, and Annette would have liked to hear it again and again, to be convinced. She saw him full of himself, used to working alone, fighting alone, extricating himself alone, putting all his pride into it; he would have

felt humiliated if he had had to seek help. So she said to herself, "What am I good for?" It is the bounty of love not only to give us faith in someone else but to give us back faith in ourself. May it be charitable to us!

This was a feeling that Philippe seldom entertained. Like most of his kind, this great doctor of the body paid little attention to maladies of the soul. He never gave a thought to the doubts that preyed upon this woman whose body lay by his side. He should not have left her the time to question herself. . . . Make an end of it, marry her! . . . Annette would whisper to him softly, "Let's go away together, so that I can never take myself back!"

But Philippe was no longer in a hurry. He was passionate, yes, but he had many other passions that were of far more importance to him: his ideas, his struggles, the controversy that was absorbing him at the moment when Annette would have liked him to think of nothing but herself. He had no intention of stirring up a conjugal scandal and hampering himself with a noisy divorce-case before he had emerged from the fire of the present battle. He had made up his mind to keep his promises. But later! Annette must have patience. It was easy enough for him to be patient. He enjoyed her. He was quite willing to leave things as they were. He flattered himself that he could impose the same forbearance upon Noémi. He flattered himself too much! He did not wish to see how intolerable this waiting was to the two women. . . .

"Naturally," thought Annette, "a man—a man worthy for us to love—will never love us as much as his ideas, his science, his art, his politics. A naïve egoism that thinks

it is disinterested because it incarnates itself in ideas. The egoism of the brain, more murderous than that of the heart. How many hearts have been broken by it!"

She was not surprised at this, for she knew life; but it hurt her. If it had only been a question of suffering she would have accepted it, however, perhaps even with that secret enjoyment of self-sacrifice which is familiar to women and which they willingly consider the price of love. But not to the point of sacrificing her self-respect and her son's honor in a humiliating situation. It hurt her that Philippe did not feel this. Of course he was not sensitive. She knew what he thought of women and love. He could not help thinking as he did; he had been shaped by his education and his rough experiences, and it was for this that she loved him. But she had flattered herself with the hope that she would change him. Instead, she perceived that day by day she was losing her power over him. And worst of all, over herself. Annette felt herself invaded by the demon of sensuality; day by day she became less the mistress of her will, more enslaved.

The duel of passion only preserves its nobility as long as there is equality between the combatants. When one is conquered the other abuses his victory and the vanquished becomes debased. Annette was at that poignant moment which precedes and determines defeat. She knew it: her strength would not sustain her any longer. Philippe knew this also, and his attitude showed it. It made no difference that he cared just as much—perhaps more, for Annette; he showed less consideration for her and he made brutal use of what belonged to him. He treated her like a conquered province. With all his days absorbed in his regular and passionate life of toil and his nights by Noémi (for he wished to keep up appearances), he saw Annette

only during brief and burning encounters. No intimacy of the heart. He maintained, cynically, that she had the best of it all.

She wanted to tear herself away from this degradation in which her senses were accomplices, but every day they became more imperious. Once, when she wished to flee from their tyranny, they refused to obey with a violence that dismayed her. A woman of such fervent energy who, after having severely disciplined and repressed her passions for ten years, opens the door of their cage at the most fiery moment of the stormy summer, runs the risk of being destroyed.

Annette could only retrieve herself by forcing Philippe to respect the wife she wished to be—the companion "*rei humanæ atque divinæ*"—the equal. She asked Philippe, she besought him in anguish, to give her up till the time came when they could love and marry openly. Philippe refused: he was as unwilling to be hampered in his passions as in his public life. He was unwilling either to do without Annette or to marry her at a time that did not suit him. He pretended to consider Annette's attempt to leave him as a rather degrading manœuvre to attach him to her. And this although he knew very well what a whole-hearted gift she had made of herself! She was insulted by the outrageous suspicion—and she gave herself again with a despairing passion and disgust.

As for himself, he would see nothing of all this. He came back, demanding his own selfish rights as a lover, never realizing that, although she consented to them, every one of these carnal victories left a wound in his partner.

Annette was degraded in her own eyes. She ceased to give herself; she prostituted herself to love. Unless

she flung herself off the slope down which her mad body was sliding, she was lost. . . .

One afternoon she fled. She went to Sylvie's and asked her to let her child stay with her for a few days, pleading as an excuse that she had to go away. Sylvie asked for no explanation; one glance was enough. This woman, whose curiosity was so often indiscreet, and who was unable in so many ways to understand her sister's ideas, had an instinct for love and its tragic tricks. In the days of the old intimacy with Annette, she had never confided to her the secrets of her own love affairs, and she did not expect Annette to open herself to her. She knew that every woman has a right to her hours of silence, her great hours, and that at such times no one can help her. One must save oneself alone or perish alone. She offered her sister the shelter of a little house she owned in the suburbs, near Jouy-en-Josas. Annette was touched, and she kissed her and accepted. In this little rustic house, on the edge of the woods, she shut herself up for a fortnight. She had not even told Marc where she was going. Her retreat was known only to Sylvie.

Scarcely had she left Paris and its enchanted circle than she perceived the excesses of the past few weeks and passed judgment on them. She was terrified by them. She, this mad creature, this miserable slave drunk with her own servitude! Passion, the destroyer of the soul! . . . Its clasp loosened. She breathed again, this evening, she saw and felt once more the fields, the woods, the calm of the earth. For two months an opaque red veil had concealed the living world from her. Even those closest to her, her son, had come to seem far away. . . . But when she reached the house in the fields, the veil was torn away in the rays of the setting sun. She heard the

bells, the birds, the voices of the peasants; she wept with relief. . . . In the middle of the night, however—she had fallen asleep exhausted—she awoke suddenly with a pang of anguish. She felt about her throat the coils of the serpent.

She spent her days in a succession of humiliating tortures, blind impulses, moments of sudden, keen, absolute clairvoyance that pierced the great deception. She had a perpetual feeling of insecurity. Even though she was prepared and armed, a mere nothing would have caused her to give way. She prolonged her absence.

She was not without danger of imperilling her situation. In this sudden eclipse, she was losing her lessons. The little clientele that she had gathered with so much trouble was passing into other hands. Sylvie forwarded letters and information to her sister, but she added nothing but good news about the child's health. She avoided giving her any advice. Annette alone was to judge.

Annette knew full well that she ought to return, but she still lingered. . . . It was in vain that she stayed on; she could not prevent her thoughts from returning to Philippe. What was he doing? Wasn't he hunting for her? . . . From him nothing had come. She dreaded any news, and she sought for it. She dismissed him from her mind, she thought she had freed herself. But he had not given her up and suddenly he rose before her.

One evening she was wandering, idle, full of haunting thoughts, under the arbor that skirted the low wall of the garden, when, between the branches, she saw an automobile coming towards her in the distance down the white road. And she thought, "It's he!" . . . She stepped back out of sight. The car drove past along the wall to the end of the little yard. Annette, with her heart tight-

ening, listened to its roaring, heard it slow down. Thirty paces farther on the road forked and the car stopped. Annette, behind the screen of leaves, ventured to glance out and saw the back of the man who was hesitating, turning round, exploring the horizon. She recognized him. Terror seized her. She ran and flung herself behind a hedge of box and sank down upon the ground, her nails scratching the earth; she lowered her head and the blood flooded her cheeks as she thought, "He is going to take me again!" She wanted to say "No" and her blood cried "Yes!" She felt the dry turf crumbling under her fingers, and, with her face buried in the boxwood, she tried to stop the roaring of the blood in her ears so that she could listen to the steps on the other side of the wall. She heard the car starting off again. She ran to the corner of the garden on the road and cried, "Philippe!"

The car disappeared at the turn.

The next day Annette went back to Paris. Did she know what she wanted or what she was going to do? Sylvie looked at her pityingly and said to herself, "It's no better." But she did not question her.

Annette, full of gratitude, remained seated without speaking, her body broken with fatigue, in a corner of her sister's room, seeking peace in this warm presence. Sylvie came and went, leaving her to recover herself in the silence. At last Annette got up to go home. As she was about to leave, Sylvie, placing her hands on either side of her forehead, looked at her a long time, shook her head and said, "If you can't do otherwise, submit; don't struggle any longer. It will pass. Everything passes, the good, the bad and we ourselves. . . . How little it all matters!"

But to Annette it mattered a great deal. The question

was not merely between Philippe and herself. It was between her and herself. To return to Philippe and confess herself conquered by him would have given her a bitter pleasure. But what terrified her was a deeper, more intimately personal defeat that would have no witness but herself. She carried her mortal adversary within her. Never once, for many years, had she failed to realize this, though from pride and prudence perhaps she had pleased herself by not thinking of it. This gulf of desire and sensual delight that a former life (her father's?) had dug within her. . . . Everything that gave her strength and pride of life, her will, her healthy soul, the free, pure breath that bathed her lungs, everything was being sucked down into it. *Mors animæ*. . . . And Annette, whose reason did not seem to believe in the soul, did not wish her soul to die.

Carried back to Paris, where Philippe was, like a captive on some Assyrian bas-relief, with a rope about her neck, she did not look for Philippe. She avoided him.

Philippe, as much possessed by Annette as Annette was by him, had come and knocked at her door in her absence. He was indignant over this sudden departure. He would not admit that she could escape him. He tried to find her address. He had Sylvie's and he went to see her. The first glance was a declaration of war. Sylvie had understood. Armed with a bitter defiance, she sized Philippe up with her own eyes and not with those of Annette—a man who would be dangerous as an enemy and more dangerous as a lover, the kind of man who destroys what he loves. She knew that sort and she would never have anything to do with them. To Philippe's peremptory questions regarding Annette's whereabouts, she

replied coldly that she knew nothing about them, taking pains that he should see that she knew everything. Philippe made an effort to conceal his annoyance. He tried to wheedle her. Sylvie remained stolid. He went away in a rage.

He wasted no time in beating the bushes for her, and it never entered his head to cover himself with dust travelling in a car to Jouy-en-Josas. He did not even look for Annette. He had no intention of sacrificing his days in a vain pursuit. He was sure she would come back. But that she should fail him, that she should allow herself to upset him at such a moment as this, was more than he could forgive; and his resentment, no less than a furious need of diversion, flung him back upon his wife. It was a provisional reconciliation and humiliating enough to this woman who was only a substitute. For it was only for want of something better; he was waiting for the other one.

But Noémi was not going to be proud when her advantage opposed it. She did not waste her time. The ordeal had revealed to her her former mistakes. She had realized that to hold a man it is not enough to make him love you. You must flatter his pride and his whims. Philippe was astonished at the interest she showed in his present campaign, astonished that she had even taken the trouble to find out about it. He suspected her motives, but whether Noémi's interest was real or not, it was very agreeable to him. It pleased him to discover Noémi's intelligence. She no longer concealed it. It was through this that Annette had ousted her. She made use of these weapons and improved on them. Unlike Annette, she did not trouble to go to the bottom of the dispute. She left this to her husband and master. She limited her

rôle to suggesting the most skilful tactics for assuring him the victory. Philippe admired her ingenuity.

At this moment the controversy was at the most violent stage. Noémi, overcoming the repugnance and boredom that she felt at these quarrels between men, perceived that she must fling herself resolutely into the arena. She set to work upholding, with the wittiest effrontery, in drawing-rooms, the daring arguments her husband had launched. Her grace, her humor, her laughing enthusiasm, her impishness, her passionate earnestness, caused some slight scandal and a great deal of amusement. She won over to her side a number of young women who were delighted to show how free they were from social prejudices. The skilful Noémi took pains not to break with appearances. Even while she gave them the most disrespectful raps, she contrived to procure indulgence for herself in the camp of morality and respectable people. She gravely maintained that the right of the poor to have no children had its counterpart in the duty of the rich to supply the State and Society with them. It required self-possession to say this and not lose her assurance, for during seven years of married life she had never found the time to fulfil this duty herself. But she was heroic. She discovered this now.

XLVI

Philippe was not slow in discovering that Annette had come back. He tried to find her in her apartment at the hours when he knew she was alone. But Annette distrusted herself. He found the door shut. In spite of his resentment and his distractions, his passion had not weak-

ened. Annette's resistance exasperated him. He was not the man to let himself be dismissed.

Annette caught sight of him a few steps away in the street. She turned pale, but she did not try to escape from him. They approached each other. He said, with decision, "You are going home. I am going with you."

"No," she replied.

Together they entered a small square that backed upon a church. A dusty tree barely concealed them from the stream of passers-by in the street. They had to restrain themselves.

"You are afraid of me."

"No," she said, "of myself."

Philippe was burning with passion and resentment. But when his hard glance encountered Annette's, which did not avoid him, he perceived the suffering that she was firmly controlling. His anger melted, and in a softened voice he asked, "Why did you run away?"

"Because you are killing me."

"Don't you know what it is to love?"

"I do know, and that is why I ran away. I am afraid of hating you."

"Well, hate me, if you like. Hating is a way of loving."

"Not for me," she said. "I can't endure it."

"You are not so weak that you can't endure both the good and evil of a complete love."

"I am not so weak, Philippe. I want a complete love. Body and soul. I don't want merely half."

"The soul is all nonsense," he said.

"Then to what purpose have you devoted all your energy? For what have you sacrificed yourself, ever since you were born, if not to your Idea?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Delusion!" he said.

"You live by it. I have mine too. Don't kill it."

"What do you want?"

"I want us to avoid seeing each other till the day when we decide whether we are to unite our lives or not."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want, I don't want to hide any longer. I don't want any more sharing. I don't want it, I don't want it."

But she did not utter her deepest reason. ("If I gave in once more, I should soon cease to have the will to desire anything else. I should no longer belong to myself. I should be a toy that is broken after it has been spoiled.")

But he was incapable of understanding this instinctive revolt against one's enslavement to one's deadly desires. He could see in it nothing but defiance and a feminine trick to get the best of him. If he did not put this into words, he did not by any means conceal his feeling. When Annette perceived this, she made an impetuous movement to leave him. Philippe, trembling with impatience and the effort he was making not to betray it to the eyes of passers-by, seized Annette's arm, pressed it and said in a furious voice which he tried to muffle, "As for me, I will not, will not give you up. I will see you. Be still! Don't answer. . . . We can't talk here. . . . I shall come and see you this evening."

"No, no!" she said.

"I shall come," he said. "I cannot live without you. Nor can you live without me."

"I can," she said, rebelliously.

"You lie!"

They struggled, without moving, in low, violent voices, lashing each other's souls. They measured each other

with their eyes. Philippe's gave way. "Annette!" he besought her.

But her cheeks still burned with the brutal lie he had given her, the shame of thinking that she really had lied. She stiffened, freed herself from the hand that held her, and went away.

In the evening Philippe came. She had spent the whole day in terror of this moment, in terror lest she might not have the strength to keep her door shut. For she did not want to face again this pitiless passion. She was convinced of the impossibility of living with this torch fastened to her breast. She must tear it away while the strength still remained to her. Did enough still remain? She loved him, she loved the flame that was consuming her. The next day she would love the shame and the outrage to which she had submitted. She blushed to admit it to herself, but even in her revolt against him that morning there had been an element of sensual delight.

She recognized his steps as they came up the stairs. She heard him ring and did not move from her chair. He rang again and knocked. Annette, with her arms hanging and her shoulders flung back, kept repeating to herself, "No! No!"

Even had she wished to rise and open the door her breath would have failed her.

She heard nothing more. Had he gone away? She was on her feet before she had even thought of it. She slipped with tottering, noiseless steps to the door. A board in the floor creaked. Annette stopped. Some seconds passed. . . . Nothing stirred. But she was aware of Philippe's presence watching behind the door. And Philippe knew that Annette was listening on the other

side. There was a heavy silence. They were spying on each other. . . . Philippe's voice, close to the door, said, "Annette, you are there. Open!"

Annette, leaning against the wall, felt her heart give way. She did not answer.

"I know you are there. Don't try to hide! Annette, open! I must speak to you."

He lowered his voice so as not to be heard on the stairway, but a flood of mingled passions was rising in him. He was on the point of shaking the door.

"I must see you. . . . Whether you wish it or not, I mean to come in. . . ."

Silence.

"Annette, I hurt you this morning. Forgive me! . . . I want you. What do you want me to do? Tell me. I will do it. . . ."

Silence. Silence.

Philippe clenched his fists. He could have strangled her. With his mouth against the door, he growled, "You are mine. You haven't the right to take yourself back.

"Think hard!" he said. "If you don't open, it is finished for ever.

"Annette, my Annette!" he said.

"Coward!" he said furiously. "You are afraid to see me. You are only strong behind a closed door."

"Why do you torture me?" said a voice behind the door.

Philippe was silent.

"My friend," the tired voice went on, "you are killing me."

Philippe was touched, but his wounded pride was unwilling to show it. "What do you want?" he said.

"Mercy!" she answered.

The tone of her voice touched him, but he did not understand. "What do you need?"

"Leave me!" she said.

His anger sprang up again. "You are driving me away?"

"I am begging you for peace. Peace! . . . Leave me alone for a few weeks."

"Yon don't love me any longer?"

"I am defending my love."

"Against whom? Against what?"

"Against you."

"Madness! . . . You will open to me."

"No!"

"I demand it. I want you."

"I am not your prey."

Quivering, she held herself straight and proud. Her eyes defied him through the door. Though he could not see them, these eyes pierced him. "Good-bye!" he cried to her.

She heard him go away, and her blood froze. He would never forgive.

XLVII

He did not forgive. Philippe did not return.

Annette kept repeating to herself, "It had to be, it had to be. . . ."

But she could not accept it. She longed to see Philippe once more, to make him understand, gently—why had he been so furious?—that she was not leaving him, that she was jealously defending her love, their love, their common pride which he was destroying with unconscious

brutality. She wanted them both to have a chance to collect themselves, to recover themselves amid the torrent of passion that was rolling them along with its mud and foam, so that they might consider things and make up their minds with perfect liberty. If he finally chose her, let it be in a fashion compatible with his wife's and his own self-respect.

But Philippe would never forgive a woman he loved who had raised a barrier against his will. If he had belonged to another social class he would have violated her. Confined as he was in the cage of his own, obliged to handle with tact this world he wished to master, his wounded passion turned into an exasperated denial of itself. Losing the woman, he destroyed the feeling he had for her. This, as he knew, would strike her to the heart. For his instinct told him that, in spite of everything, Annette loved him.

After three months of burning solitude, of a bitter and tormented self-communion, of hope, renunciation, pride, servility of soul, inner reproaches, after three months of hopeless, sterile waiting, Annette learned one day from the delighted Solange of the happiness that had fulfilled the longings of the Villard household. Noémi was about to have a child.

XLVIII

Annette would have liked to take refuge with her child and hide her unhappy head under the wing of the love which, they say, never fails one—that of the son for the mother. Alas, it fails like all the others. Annette could not look to Marc for a sign of tenderness or even interest.

Never had the young boy seemed colder, more indifferent, more unfeeling. He saw nothing of the torments that ravaged his mother. To be sure, she did her best to conceal them from him. But she concealed them so badly! He might have seen them in her eyes, hollow as they were with sleeplessness, in her pale face, in her thin hands, in her whole body, which was wasted by cruel passion. He saw nothing. He did not even look. He was concerned with nothing but himself, and what took place in him he kept to himself. He saw her only at meal-times, when he never said a word; the efforts Annette made to talk only made him more obstinate in his silence. She could scarcely induce him to say good-morning and good-night at the beginning and the end of the day, for he had made up his mind that all such things were mere affectation, and he only agreed to them—and that not every day—for the sake of peace. He would hastily offer his mother's lips a bored forehead, and when he did not go out to school or on some affair of his own—it was not easy to get him to tell about the latter—he shut himself up in his workroom, a store-room, about the size of a large wardrobe, wedged in between the dining-room and his bedroom; and it was a mistake to disturb him there. At the table or in the sitting-room, he seemed like a stranger. Annette said to herself bitterly, "If I died he would not even weep."

And she thought of the dream she had once conceived of the dear little companion, blood of her blood, pressed close against her, divining, sharing, without words, all the secrets of her heart. How lacking in affection he was! Why was he so hard? One would have said at moments that he was angry with her. Why? Because she loved him too much?

"Yes, that is my weakness, loving too much. People do not need it. It bores them. . . . My son does not love me! He is only too anxious to leave me. My son is so little my son! He feels nothing of what I feel. He feels nothing!"

During these very days Marc's young heart was aflame with love and poetry. He had fallen madly in love with Noémi. It was one of those childish loves that are so absurd and all-consuming. He hardly knew what he wanted of this woman: was it to see her, feel her, touch her, taste her? Of course, he never dreamed of what possession meant: he was the possessed one. Marc almost fainted when he touched the little hand that Noémi held out to him, touched it with his lips and the tip of his nose, the greedy puppy's nose that inhaled, in the frail flower of the wrist, the intoxicating mystery of the feminine body. For him she was a living fruit and flower. He was dying with desire to implant his teeth in it—very gently—dying of terror lest he might yield. Once—oh, shame!—he did yield. . . . What was going to happen? Red and trembling, he expected the worst: public humiliation, indignant words, an ignominious dismissal. But she burst out laughing, called him "puppy," boxed his ear, rubbed his nose once, twice, three times, over the spot he had bitten, saying, "Beg my pardon, little wretch!"

From that moment she had amused herself playing with the young animal. She meant no harm, she meant no good. She enjoyed exciting the young lover. For her it was a matter of no moment. She never suspected how serious it might be for the boy. But for him (for him who, in spite of appearances, was the true child of Annette) it was tragic.

Since the first time he had seen her, she had been for him the forbidden Paradise, that marvellous mirage, woman, which appears before the awakening glance of an innocent child. The fascinating image is shaped as much from what exists as from what does not exist, as much from what he sees as from what he does not see, what he does not know, what he fears and desires, what he wants and what he does not want, the terrifying attraction that thrills the adolescent body at the ecstatic, brutal appeal of nature. As for Noémi's features, he probably did not see one of them just as it was. But each of her features and each of her movements, the folds of her dress, the curls of her hair, her voice, her perfume, and the gleam of her eyes, everything stirred in his hungry heart and body the wild, leaping waves of joy and hope, cries of happiness, the need of tears.

On the very day when the heart-broken Annette saw him so hard, so hostile, so icy, when her awkward effort to learn the cause, to drag out of him one word, one single word of affection, had brought down upon her a cutting reply—on just that day the young boy had had his most moving revelation of the enchanted dream. For eight days he had been living in a state of intoxication. Noémi, whom he continued to see, without his mother's knowing it, and who used him as a little spy who innocently brought her word of all the movements in the enemy's camp—Noémi, whom he had once surprised in her drawing-room, looking at herself, as she talked, in a tiny mirror hidden in the folds of her handkerchief, had amused herself painting his pale lips with her lipstick. He had had in his mouth the taste of the beloved mouth. And ever since he had carried it on the tongue that sucked it; he was impregnated with it. He

saw this pomegranate red, this ever-open mouth with the lip drawn up, too short and too restless to meet the other lip, which was as full as a cherry—saw it everywhere on that morning when, leaving his mother's apartment, after rudely slamming the door, he decided to play hookey from school and go for a walk. It blossomed in the cloud-orchard of the beautiful July sky, in the little playful ripples of a fountain, in the absent-minded smiles of passing women. It obsessed him.

He was walking at random, with his blond head bare to the summer wind. But, abstracted as he was and full of his own fancies, his lynx-eyes recognized his Aunt Sylvie, in the distance, coming towards him on the other sidewalk. He hastily turned off into a side street. The last thing he wanted was to meet her. Not that he was afraid of being caught playing truant: she would have been much more likely to laugh at that. But when he had a secret, with her—it was not like this with his mother!—he never felt safe. Of secrets of this kind, his instinct told him, Aunt Sylvie was an expert reader.

She had not seen him. He breathed freely again. He could enjoy his love the whole morning. And as he strolled along—his love did not prevent him from halting before the shop-windows to look at a necktie, a trifle of some kind, an illustrated paper—his steps led him unawares straight to his goal. He was like those pigeons in Paris that fly every morning over the great piles of dusty houses seeking the green gardens and cool old trees. The boy was seeking them too. He felt the need of their rustling shade.

He went down the Mont Sainte-Geneviève and, leaving the old, crowded streets, found himself in the clear, calm spaces of the Jardin des Plantes before he was

aware that this was the spot to which he had wished to come.

There were few people here at this hour. A handful of scattered strollers. Paris hummed like a hive in the distance. The blue vibration of a beautiful summer morning. He picked out a bench that was hidden at the foot of a group of trees, and he closed his eyes on his treasure. He pressed his long, feverish, adolescent hands against his breast as if he wished to shelter his heart from rash eyes. What was he hiding, what thing so precious that he scarcely dared to think of it? A remark Noémi had thoughtlessly uttered, a remark of which he had made a world. . . . The last time he had seen her she had thrown him a chance smile. She had been scarcely aware of the boy's presence, for her attention was absorbed in the great things that had happened (the reconquest of Philippe, the humiliation of Annette, the final victory! . . . "But one never knows! Nothing is certain. Let us be satisfied with today! . . .") She sighed from fatigue, relaxation, pleasure. Marc asked her why. Amused by the boy's alarmed, ingenuous gaze, she said, with another great sigh, to puzzle him, "It's a secret."

"What secret?"

A malicious thought darted through her mind and Noémi replied, "I can't tell you. You must guess."

Trembling with emotion, he said, "I don't know. Tell me."

She lowered her lids over her languorous eyes. "No, no, no!"

Blushing, stammering, he was afraid to understand.

To keep up the game, she assumed a mysterious air and said, "Would you like to have it?"

In his emotion he was ready to cry, "No!"

"Well, not today. . . . I'll tell you some other time."
"When?"
"Soon."
"How soon?"
"Soon. . . . Next week, when you come to dinner."

The week had passed. This was the evening, Marc was thinking, when he was to see her again. He was only living in the expectation of that moment. He had lived it through twenty times in advance! He never dared to go to the end of the scene. It was too agonizing. . . . But to linger on the way was so sweet! On the garden-bench he gave way to his languor. A clock struck noon. Behind a screen of trees the sand of a sunny path crunched under the feet of a little girl who passed singing. Further on, in an aviary, some exotic birds were chirping in a strange, agitating language. From far away, on the Seine, came the long-drawn-out sound of the siren of a tug. And noiselessly, without seeing him, two lovers passed him slowly with their arms entwined as they walked, a tall, dark girl and a pale young workman whose lips touched and who devoured each other with their eyes. Holding his breath, the boy gazed after them till their path turned, and as they disappeared he sobbed with happiness, the happiness that had passed, the happiness that was coming. The happiness that was in them, in everything that surrounded him, in this July noon—in his own burning heart which embraced it all.

He went home in the halo of this moment of ecstasy. It was infinitely greater than the feminine image that had aroused it. The shadow of Noémi melted into a golden bath, and he had to make an effort to summon it up again. Marc tried to do so, but it escaped him. He was cheating himself, pretending to find under this happiness, which

was so intense that it was painful, in everything that filled his heart to overflowing, the boundless hopes, the heroic resolutions, the strength and good will that bore him up like wings as he ran upstairs, four steps at a time. But the moment he caught sight of his mother's severe face—he was three-quarters of an hour late for lunch—the glory faded. He fell back beneath the sullen cloud of silence.

Annette did not try to talk to him. She had her own burden of anxieties, and she could not share his. Her son, sitting opposite her at table, seemed self-centred and far away. He ate ravenously. He was hungry and eager to finish so that he could plunge back again into his day-dreams.

Annette thought, "I am nothing to him but the person who gives him his food."

She no longer had even the courage to protest. She felt abandoned. Towards the end of the meal he became aware that he had not spoken, and he felt vaguely remorseful. But he was afraid that if he said a word she would begin to question him. He thrust his badly folded napkin into its ring, rose hurriedly, and, taking care not to catch his mother's eye, went out . . . or was going out, when, on a sudden impulse, he asked—he was sure, for Noémi had told him, but he wanted confirmation—"It's tonight we are dining at the Villards'?"

Annette, who was still sitting there, motionless and dejected, said, without looking up, "We are not dining out."

Marc stopped, astonished, on the threshold. "What! They told me so!"

"Who told you?"

In his embarrassment the boy did not answer. His mother knew nothing about his visits to Noémi. He

hastened to turn aside the question with another question, "But when are we going, then?"

Annette shrugged her shoulders. There were never going to be any more dinners at the Villards'. Noémi had said, for fun, "Next week," as she might have said, "In the year forty."

Marc let go of the door-knob and turned back in distress. Annette looked at him, saw how disappointed he was, and said, "I don't know."

"What! You don't know?"

"The Villards have gone away," said Annette.

"No!" Marc cried.

She did not seem to hear him. Marc laid an impatient hand on his mother's arm, which was stretched out over the table, and besought her, "It isn't true?"

Annette roused herself from her torpor, rose and began to clear the table.

"But where, where?" cried Marc, overwhelmed.

"I don't know," said Annette. She gathered up the dishes and went out.

Marc stood there, haggard, before his ruined dream. He did not understand. This sudden departure, without a word of warning. . . . Impossible! . . . He started to follow his mother, to drag some explanation out of her. But, no! He stopped short. . . . No, this wasn't true! He understood now. . . . Annette had discovered his love. She wanted to separate them. She was lying, she was lying! Noémi had not gone away. . . . And he hated his mother.

He slipped out of the apartment, tumbled down the stairs, walked, ran, with a beating heart, to the Villards'. He was going to make sure that they had not left. And as a matter of fact, they were there. The footman said

that Monsieur had just gone out; Madame was tired and was not receiving anyone. But Marc urged that she would let him have a moment's conversation with her. The servant returned. Madame was sorry, but it was impossible. The boy insisted, feverishly, that he must see her just for a moment; he had something very important to tell her. . . . Meanwhile, he said all sorts of incoherent things, stuttering and choking in a broken voice, making awkward gestures; he blushed, he was on the point of weeping. The curious, mocking eyes of the impassive footman made him lose the thread of his ideas. He was pushed towards the door. He resisted stupidly, crying out that he forbade anyone to touch him. The servant told him to get out, said that if he did not hold his tongue he would telephone to the concierge and have him taken down by force. . . . The door closed behind him. Ashamed and furious, he remained on the threshold, unable to make up his mind to leave. And as he leaned mechanically against the door, he saw it was not shut tight and was yielding. He pushed it open and stepped inside again. He meant at all costs to reach Noémi. The vestibule was empty. He knew where the room was and slipped into the corridor. He heard Noémi's voice from within. She was saying to the footman, "Never in the world! He bores me to death! You did quite right in pushing him out, the little fool!"

He found himself back on the landing. He fled, he wept, he ground his teeth, he was distracted. He sat down, choking, on one of the steps of the staircase. He did not want people to see him crying in the street.

Wiping away his tears, he assumed an air of calm that covered his mad grief and, without knowing where he was going, he set out for home again. He was desperate.

To die, he wanted to die! Life was no longer possible. It was too ugly, too base, it lied, everything lied. He could not breathe. As he crossed the Seine he thought of flinging himself into it. But another unfortunate had been ahead of him. The banks looked as if they were black with flies. Thousands of women and children were leaning over the parapet, eagerly watching as the drowned man was drawn out. What feelings stirred them? A very few felt a sadistic thrill. A few more felt pity. The immense majority felt the attraction of the unusual event, idle curiosity. A good number, perhaps, looked into their own hearts to see how a person suffers ("how I might suffer"), to see how a person dies ("how I might die"). Marc perceived only a base curiosity, and it horrified him. Kill himself, yes, but not in public! He was like Annette. He had a shy, fierce pride; he could never make a spectacle of himself before this rabble, never be mauled by their hands, violated in his nakedness by their dirty glances. He clenched his teeth and hurried home, hurried faster, resolved to kill himself.

In the course of the minute searches which, during his mother's absences, he had devoted to the apartment he had found a revolver. It was Noémi's; Annette had picked it up after she had left and placed it, too carelessly, in a drawer. He had appropriated it and hidden it. His mind was made up. As, with a child, an act, whenever it is possible, immediately follows the thought, Marc meant to carry out his resolution at once. Re-entering the apartment as noiselessly as he had gone out, he shut himself up in his room and loaded the revolver as he had seen a schoolmate do: the latter, who was hardly older than himself, had carried one of these dangerous playthings in his pocket and, holding it between his legs, in the

Greek class, had explained to his attentive neighbors how to handle it. The weapon was ready now. Marc was prepared to fire. . . . Where should he place himself? He must not miss. There, standing before his mirror. . . . But afterwards where would he fall? . . . It would be better to sit here, leaning on the table, with the mirror in front of him. He unhooked the mirror, placed it on the table, and propped it up with a dictionary. . . . There, he could see himself perfectly. He took the revolver and pressed it. . . . Where? Against the temple; they say that's the best place. . . . Would it hurt very much? He did not give a thought to his mother. His passion, his sufferings and the preparations completely occupied him. . . . His eyes in the mirror touched his heart. . . . Poor Marc! . . . He felt the need of expressing, of making known before he disappeared, what he had suffered from the world and how much he despised it. . . . The need of avenging himself, of leaving regrets behind him, of arousing admiration. . . . He hunted up a big sheet of school-paper, folded it across—he was in a hurry—and wrote in his uncertain, laborious, childish script, "*I cannot live any longer, for she has betrayed me. The whole world is wicked. I don't love anything any longer, so I would rather die. All women are liars. They are mean. They don't know how to love. I despise her. When they bury me I ask them to put this paper over me: 'I die for Noémi.'*"

At this dear name he wept; he pressed his handkerchief against his mouth in order not to make a noise. He wiped away his tears, reread his lines, and thought gravely, "I mustn't compromise her."

Then he tore up the sheet and began again. Almost in spite of himself he breathlessly dashed off his despairing

lines. When he reached the sentence "*They don't know how to love,*" he continued, "*I have known and I die.*" In the midst of his grief he was very much pleased with this phrase: it almost consoled him. It disposed him to be kind to those he was leaving behind him, and he ended generously, "*I forgive you all.*" He added his signature. A few seconds more and all would be over; he would be delivered, and he saw in advance the fine effect it would produce. But just as he was passing the pen once more over the childish flourishes where the ink had failed, the door of the little room opened suddenly behind him. He had just enough time to hide the weapon and the papers under his arms. Annette saw only the mirror placed against the dictionary and she thought Marc was admiring himself. She made no comment. She seemed terribly tired and, in a low voice, as if she were exhausted, she said she had forgotten to buy milk for dinner and that Marc would be very kind if he would spare her the trouble of climbing up and down the four flights by going after it. As for him, he had only one idea, that she should not see what his arms covered. He did not wish to move and replied roughly that he did not have the time; he was busy. With a sad smile, Annette closed the door and went out.

He heard her slowly descending the stairs. (She had looked worn out.) He was seized with remorse. He could not forget the expression of her face and her tired voice. . . . He threw the revolver hastily into a drawer, buried the *farewells to life* under a pile of books and rushed out of the apartment. He jostled his mother on the stairs and called to her, in a cross voice, that he was going to do the errand. Annette came upstairs again, her heart somewhat lightened. She was thinking that the boy

was not as contrary as he seemed. But she had been pained by his rudeness and his harshness. Heavens, how unaffectionate he was! . . . Well, so much the better for him! Poor child, he would suffer less from life. . . .

When Marc came back, he had quite forgotten his intention to commit suicide. It gave him no pleasure to find the famous Testament, imperfectly hidden, on his table. He hastened to place it completely out of sight in the bottom of a band-box. He dismissed the depressing thought. He felt now how cowardly, how cruel, it would have been to his mother, whose health worried him. But he expressed his concern clumsily; he did not know how to ask her about it and she did not know how to reply. Through misplaced pride he did not want to show his real feelings; it would have seemed as if he were awkwardly performing a mere polite duty. And she, as proud as himself, did not want to worry him, and she turned the conversation away from it. So they both fell back into their silence. Freed from his anxiety, Marc now felt that he had the right to be angry with his mother because for her he had sacrificed his suicide. . . . He was well aware that he no longer felt the least desire for this; but he needed to avenge himself for what he had suffered. When you cannot avenge yourself on others you do so on your mother; she is always there, at hand, and she does not strike back.

So they remained walled-up, each one absorbed in his own grief. And Marc, whose own sorrow had begun to weigh upon him, felt his animosity against Annette's increasing. He was relieved when he heard the door-bell announcing Aunt Sylvie—for he knew her ring. She had come to take him to a performance of Isadora's, for she had suddenly gone crazy over dancing. In spite of the

duty that he felt to retain in his soul and also on his face —especially on his face—the fatal mark of the ordeal through which he had passed, he could not hide his joy at escaping. He ran to dress, leaving the door open so as to lose none of the gay talk of his aunt, who, the moment she had arrived, had launched into a frivolous story. And Annette, who was forcing herself to smile, though she was broken-hearted, thought, "Can this be the woman who cried her heart out a year ago over her child's body? Has she forgotten?"

She did not envy this elasticity. But her son's laugh, as he answered Sylvie's sallies from the other room, evidenced an equal gift of forgetfulness. Annette, who was pained by this apparent heartlessness, did not know that she too possessed this cruel and marvellous gift. When Marc reappeared, beaming, ready to start, she could not command her face enough to conceal her harsh disapproval. Marc was more hurt by this than he would have been by out-and-out censure. He avenged himself by exaggerating his gaiety. He became almost noisy and seemed in such a hurry to get away that he forgot to say good-bye to his mother. He thought of it after he had gone out. Should he go back? Let her worry! He pouted. It comforted him to leave behind him that reproachful face, that sadness, the depressing atmosphere he felt in the house, and the disturbing traces of the day's troubles. . . . That immense day! . . . A whole world! . . . Several lifetimes in a few hours, the peak of joy and the depths of despair. . . He ought to have been crushed under such a load of emotions, but it weighed no more on the elastic adolescent than a bird weighs on a branch. The bird flies away, the branch swings back and sways in the wind. They had flown away, the joys and

sorrows of the day that was past! Only a dream remained of them. To enjoy the new joys and the new sorrows, he hastened to efface it.

But Annette, who had no means of knowing what was passing through his head, Annette, who, like him, was a passionate soul, attributed everything to herself; and, as she listened to his laughter receding down the stairs, she was struck to the heart by his joy at leaving her. She thought he hated her, for her passion always exaggerated things in every way. . . . She was a burden on him, yes, that was quite clear. He longed to be free from her. When she was dead he would be happier. . . . Happier! . . . She would be happier too. It stabbed her through and through, this absurd thought that her son, her child, might desire her death. . . . (Absurd? Who can tell? In his innermost heart, in a moment's madness, what child has not desired his mother's death?) . . . The terror of this intuition, striking Annette at this moment when she was holding on to life with one weak hand, was a mortal blow to her.

All day she had been devastated by the furious return of her passion. Now that her decision had been made and carried out, the irreparable deed consummated, now that she had deliberately done her duty, she no longer had the strength to resist the attack of the enemy within. And the enemy had rushed upon her like a torrent.

She was a party to it. She had opened the gates to it. When all is lost, one has at least the right to enjoy one's despair! My suffering concerns only myself. Let me feel the whole of it. Bleed, bleed, my heart! Let me stab you by forcing you to see again all you have lost! Philippe. . . . He was there before her. . . . The evocation was so strong that she saw him, spoke to him,

touched him. . . . He, everything that she loved in him, the attraction of that which resembles and that which is opposed to us, the antagonistic union, burning with the double fire of love and combat, the embrace and the struggle: they are the same thing. And this illusory embrace had such a carnal violence that the possessed soul, possessed by love, bent like Leda beneath the swan. The flood of passion ebbed despairingly. Then came those agonies that are part of the life of every woman who is made for love and to whom her share of love has been refused—agonies that come at this time of life when, if a love dies, she thinks that love itself is dying. On this night Annette, alone in her room, abandoned by her son, with her passion mutilated, suffered tortures in the destitution of her heart, and the haunting belief that love was lost forever, that life was lost without love, gripped her by the throat. It did not give her a moment's respite. She drove it away; it returned. Annette tried in vain to fill her mind with other things. She picked up her work, tossed it aside, got up, sat down. With her head on the table, she wrung her hands. The fixed idea maddened her. She had reached that point of suffering when to escape from herself a woman is ready for the worst aberrations. Annette felt that she was on the verge of madness, and she was aware, in her delirium, of a savage impulse, the frightful desire to go down into the street and to debase herself in her fury, destroy her body and her tortured heart, prostitute herself to the first man she met. When she became aware of this bestial thought, she cried out in horror; and as a result of this horror the infamous idea would not relax its grip. Then, like her son, she thought of killing herself. She could no longer control her obsession. . . .

She rose and went towards the door, but to reach it she had to pass close to the open window; she decided that, once there, she would fling herself out! . . . A strange instinct of purity that wished to save her soul from pollution! That illusory soul! Her reason was not duped by the conventional morality. But her instinct was stronger and it saw more clearly. . . . Entirely occupied by her double obsession—the door and the window—she did not see what was close to her. Walking towards the window, she struck herself violently in the stomach against the sharp corner of the sideboard. The pain was so severe that she could not breathe. Doubled over, with her hands on the wounded spot, she felt a keen, revengeful joy that her stomach had been struck. She would have liked to break to pieces in her body the blind and drunken master, the tiger-god. . . . Then the reaction came. She sank down on a low chair that fitted in between the sideboard and the window, and her strength failed her. Her hands were icy, her face beaded with perspiration; the beating of her disordered heart wavered. Ready to slip into the abyss, she had only one thought, "Quicker, quicker! . . ."

She fainted.

XLIX

When she opened her eyes again—(When was it? After a few seconds? . . . A gulf . . .)—her head was thrown back as if on a block, her neck was lying against the window-sill, her body wedged into the narrow angle of the wall. She opened her eyes and over the dark roofs, in the July night, she saw the stars. . . . One of them pierced her with its divine gaze.

Silence, unprecedented, vast as a plain. . . . Yet the wagons were rolling by in the street below; the glasses on the sideboard vibrated. She heard nothing. . . . Suspended between earth and sky. . . . *"A noiseless flight."* . . . *"She was not entirely awake. . . ."*

She put off the moment. She was afraid of finding again what she had left behind—the horrible lassitude, the torment, the snare of love: love, maternity, implacable egoism, that of nature who cares so little for my troubles, who only watches till I awaken so as to break my heart. . . . Never to wake again! . . .

She became conscious, none the less. And she saw that the enemy was no longer there. Her despair had vanished. . . . Vanished? No, it was still there, but it was no longer in her. She saw it outside. She heard its rustle. . . . Magic. . . . A terrible music disclosing unknown spaces. . . . Paralyzed, Annette heard, as if some invisible hand were conjuring it up in the room, the sound of sobbing, the Fatum of a Chopin prelude. Her heart was flooded with a joy she had never before experienced. It had nothing but the name in common with the poor joy of everyday life which is afraid of pain, which only exists because it denies pain, denies that immense joy which is also pain. . . . Annette listened with closed eyes. The voice stopped. There was an expectant silence. And suddenly from the torn soul a wild cry of deliverance flew upward as if on wings. As a diamond leaves its track on a piece of glass, it streaked across the vault of the night. In her exhaustion, as she lay on her hard pillow, Annette, on the threshold of this night of sorrow, gave birth to a new soul. . . .

The silent cry whirled far away and disappeared in the abyss of thought. Annette remained silent and motion-

less. A long time. . . . At last she rose, her neck aching, her limbs stiff. But her soul was delivered. An irresistible force pushed her towards the table. She did not know what she was going to do. Her heart was in her throat. She could not keep it all to herself. She took up her pen and, in a whirlwind of passion, without metre, in a rough and jerky rhythm, in a single torrent, she poured out the flood of pain. . . .

You have come, your hand holds me,—I kiss your hand.
In love, in fear,—I kiss your hand.

Love, you have come to destroy me. I know it well.
My knees tremble. Come, destroy!—I kiss your hand.

You eat the fruit and fling it away: bite my heart, it is yours!
Blest be the wound your teeth make!—I kiss your hand.

You want me—all; but, possessing all, you will possess nothing.
You leave nothing but ruins.—I kiss your hand.

To-morrow your hand, caressing me, will kill me.
Even as I kiss it, I await the mortal stroke of your hand.

Kill me! Strike! In doing me evil, you will do me good.
You deliver me, destroyer.—I kiss your hand.

Every blow that makes me bleed breaks a bond.
You tear away the chains with the flesh.—I kiss your hand.

You break the prison of my body, murderer,
And through the breach my life escapes.—I kiss your hand.

I am the broken soil from which rises the grain
Of the sorrow that you sowed.—I kiss your hand.

Sow the sacred sorrow! May all the sorrow of the world
Come to ripeness in my breast.—I kiss your hand, I kiss your hand. . . .

Tempest, sea-waves crashing against the rocks, a soul laden with spray, flashing with lightning, a surf foaming with passions and tears dashed up towards the sky. . . .

And at the last cry of the wild birds the soul fell back suddenly. And Annette, exhausted, flung herself on her bed and slept.

L

When morning came, nothing remained of the sorrows of the night but a light snow that melted in the sun. . . . *Cosi la neve al sol si disigilla.* . . . And the aching peace of a body that has fought and knows it has conquered.

She felt satiated, satiated with her grief. Grief is like passion. To deliver oneself from it, one has to glut oneself with it. But few people have the hardihood to do this. They feed the snarling dog with crumbs from their table. The only people who conquer grief are those who dare to embrace its excess, who say to it, "I take you to myself. You shall bring forth children through me. . . ." That powerful embrace of the creative soul, as brutal and fertile as actual possession. . . .

On the table Annette found what she had written. She tore it up. These disordered words had become as unbearable to her as the feelings they expressed. She did not want to disturb the sense of well-being that pervaded her. She had a feeling of relief, as if a knot, a link of the chain, had just been broken. . . . And in a flash she had a vision of the chain of servitudes from which, one by one, the soul slowly frees itself through a series of existences, its own and those of others (they are all the same). . . . And she asked herself: "Why, why these

eternal attachments, these eternal ruptures? Towards what liberation does desire drive us in its sanguinary progress?"

It was only for a moment. Why worry about what is going to happen? It will pass, just like what has already happened. We know quite well that, no matter what happens, we shall make our way through. As the saying goes, that old heroic utterance of prayer and defiance: "May God only not lay upon our shoulders heavier burdens than we can bear!"

She had borne hers, that of a day. Well, one day at a time! . . . She was eased in heart and body. . . . *To strive, to seek,* NOT *to find, and not to yield.* . . . "It's all right. It's all right. . . . I haven't wasted my time. . . . Leave the rest to tomorrow!"

She rose. She was naked, and from over the roofs the morning sun bathed her body and the room. . . . She was happy. . . . Yes, in spite of everything!

Everything about her was just as it had been yesterday: the sky, the earth, the past and the future. But everything that had crushed her yesterday was radiant today.

Marc had come home very late in the evening. He had enjoyed himself without his mother, and now he felt remorse at having left her alone and made her sit up for him. For he knew that Annette would not go to bed until he had returned, and he had expected an icy reception. Although he was in the wrong he assumed as he went upstairs—if only for that reason—an attitude of defiance. With an insolent smile on his lips, although at bottom he was not sure of himself, he picked up the key from under the doormat and opened the door. Hanging up his coat in the vestibule, he listened. Silence. Nothing stirred. Noiselessly, he tiptoed into his room and

went to bed. He felt relieved. Serious matters could wait until tomorrow! But before he was entirely undressed he was seized with anxiety. This stillness was not natural. . . . Like his mother he had a vivid imagination and one that was easily disturbed. . . . What had happened? . . . He was a thousand miles from suspecting the deadly storms that had raged that night in the room adjoining his own. His mother was inexplicable and disturbing to him. He never knew what she was thinking. Seized with alarm, in his nightshirt and bare feet, he went and pressed his ear to Annette's door. He was reassured. She was there. She was asleep; her breathing was loud and uneven. He pushed open the door, fearing that she was ill, and stole up to the bed. By the light from the street he saw her, stretched out flat on her back, with her hair over her cheeks, with that tragic face which, in nights of old, had stirred the curiosity of her companion Sylvie. Her breast rose and fell heavily, harshly, violently, with difficulty. Marc was seized with fear and pity for all the weariness and suffering he divined in this body. Bending over the pillow, in a low, trembling voice, he murmured "Mamma."

As if she had heard the call from far away in her sleep, she made an effort to free herself and groaned. The child drew back, frightened. She relapsed into her immobility. Marc went back to bed. The thoughtlessness of his age, the fatigue of the day, got the better of his anxiety. He slept without waking until morning.

When he got up, the fancies and fears of the past evening returned. He was surprised that his mother was not yet visible. As a rule, she came into his room to kiss him and say good-morning while he was in bed. She had not come in this morning. But he heard her coming and

going in the neighboring room. He opened the door. Kneeling on the floor, she was dusting the furniture and did not turn round. Marc said good-morning to her. She turned her smiling eyes on him and said, "Good-morning, my dear." Then she went on with her work, paying no more attention to him.

He expected she would ask him about his evening. He detested these questions, but when she did not ask them he was vexed. She went into her room, put it in order and finished dressing. It was time for her classes; she was getting ready to go out. He saw her looking at herself in the mirror, with dark circles about her eyes, her face still showing lines of fatigue, but with a light in her eyes! Her mouth was smiling. He was astonished at the sight. He had expected to find her sad and he was even ready to pity her in his heart; this disturbed his plans. The little man's logic was upset by it.

But Annette had her own logic. "The heart has its reasons" which a sense higher than reason understands. Annette had ceased to worry about what others might think. She knew now that you must not ask others to understand you. If they love you, it is with their eyes closed. They don't close them often! . . . "Let them be as they wish to be! Whatever they are, I love them. I cannot live without loving them. And if they don't love me I have enough love in my heart both for myself and for them."

She smiled into the mirror with a smile that came from far deeper depths than her eyes, smiled at the fire of which they were a spark, at eternal Love. She let her arms fall from her head, turned towards her son, saw the child's troubled face, remembered his evening out, took hold of the tip of his chin, and, letting the syllables drop,

said gaily, "You were dancing? I'm so glad! And now you must sing!"

She laughed as she saw his amazed expression, caressed him with her eyes, kissed him on his nose and, picking up her bag from the table, went out, saying, "Good-bye, my little cricket!"

In the vestibule he heard her whistling a careless tune. (It was a talent he envied her even while he despised it, for she whistled much better than he.)

He was indignant! This indecent gaiety after all the evening's anxiety. . . . She had escaped him. He denounced the eternal caprices of women, their lack of seriousness, as he had heard others do . . . *"la donna mobile."*

He was about to go out when a piece of paper in the scrap-basket caught his attention. At a distance the sharp, prying eyes of the rapacious child unthinkingly deciphered a few words on a fragment of the sheet. He stopped short. . . . These words. . . . His mother's writing! He picked them up, read them feverishly, at random at first, one at a time. These flaming words! . . . As they were torn into bits, the emotion they called up, interrupted in the midst of its flight, was all the more fascinating. . . . He gathered them together, rummaged in the basket for the smallest fragments, took them all and patiently pieced them together. His hands trembled at the secret he had captured by surprise. When he had assembled all the pieces and was able to grasp the poem as a whole, he was completely taken aback. He did not understand it very well, but the wild fervor of this solitary song revealed to him unknown depths of passion and grief that exalted and dismayed him. Was it possible that these stormy cries had come from his mother's breast? . . . No, no, it wasn't possible! He wouldn't have it.

He told himself that she had copied them from a book. . . . But from what book? He couldn't ask her. . . . And yet, suppose it wasn't taken from a book . . . ? The tears came, the need of crying out his emotion, his love, a longing to throw himself into his mother's arms, at her feet, to open his heart to her, to read her own . . . And he couldn't do it. . . .

When his mother came home at noon for lunch, the boy, who had spent the whole morning reading and copying the torn fragments and had thrust them in an envelope into his breast, said nothing to her. Sitting at his table, he even refrained from rising and turning his head towards her when she entered. The more burning was his desire to know, the stiffer was the constraint that led him to conceal his anxiety under a mask of insensibility. If, after all, these tragic words were not Annette's! Doubt returned to him at the sight of his mother's tranquil face. . . . But the other, the upsetting doubt, persisted all the same. . . . Supposing they were hers? . . . This woman, my mother? . . . Facing her at table, he did not dare look at her. . . . But when her back was turned and she moved about the room, looking for something, carrying a plate, he stared at her eagerly with questioning eyes that asked: "Who are you?"

He could not define his troubled, fascinated, uneasy impression. But Annette, full of her new life, noticed nothing.

LI

In the afternoon they went out, each about his own business. Marc watched his mother in the distance. He

was torn by conflicting feelings: he admired her, he was irritated by her. . . . Women were too much for him! Women, every woman. At times they were so close, at other times so very far away! A strange race. . . . Nothing about them is like ourselves. One never knows what is going on in them, why they laugh, why they cry. He scorned them, he despised them, he needed them, he pined for them! He was angry with them just because of this obsession. He could have bitten the neck of that woman who was walking by as he had bitten Noémi's wrist—as he would have liked to bite it—till the blood flowed! At this sudden memory his startled heart gave a leap. He stopped, turned pale and spat with disgust.

He crossed the Luxembourg Gardens, where the young men were playing. He looked at them enviously. The best part of him, his secret desires, went out towards manly activity, without love, without women—sport, heroic games. But he was weakly: an unjust fate, his illness as a child, had placed him in a position of inferiority in the race of his own generation. And his sedentary life, his books, his dreams, the companionship of women, the two sisters, had poisoned him with this venom of love, transmitted by his mother, his aunt, his grandfather, by all the blood of the Rivières. How he would have liked to spill that blood, to open his veins! Ah, how he envied those young men with their beautiful limbs, empty of thought, full of light!

All the riches that were his he despised. He could think of nothing but those of which he was deprived, the games and contests of harmonious bodies. And in his injustice he did not see that other contest which his mother was waging so close to him. . . .

She walked on. The summer was pouring its splendid waves over the city. The blue gaze of the sky bathed the tops of the houses. . . . How good it would have been to be far away from the city in the fields! . . . But that was more than she could ask for: Annette did not have the means to leave Paris. No doubt Marc would be able to go off for a few weeks with his aunt to some beach in Normandy. But Annette would not go; her pride would not allow her to be a charge on her sister. Besides, ever since the days when she had seen them with her father, she had felt an aversion for summer-resorts, with all their bored people, those flirtations of the idle and the curious. She would stay at home alone. She did not mind this. She carried within herself the sea and the sky, the sunsets behind the hills, the milky fogs, the fields stretching out under the shroud of moonlight, the calm death of the nights. In the August afternoon, breathing the warm air, amid the uproar of the streets and the flood of human beings, Annette crossed Paris with the quick, sure step, the light, rhythmical step of other days, noting everything as she passed and yet very far away. . . . In the great, dusty street, shaken by the wheels of the heavy autobusses, she was wandering in her thought under the vaults of the forest in that Burgundian countryside where she had spent her happy childhood, and her nostrils caught the odor of bark and moss. She was walking over the fallen autumn leaves. A rain-laden wind swept through the stripped branches, brushing her cheek with its damp wing; a bird's song flowed magically through the silence; the rain-laden wind passed her. . . . Through these woods the young Annette passed also with her weeping lover, and there was the hawthorne hedge, there were the bees about the abandoned house.

. . . Joys and sorrows. . . . So far away! She smiled at her own youthful image to which suffering was still so new. . . . "Wait, my poor Annette, you are only at the beginning. . . ."

"Do you regret nothing?"

"Nothing!"

"Neither what you have done nor what you have failed to do?"

"Nothing, deceitful spirit! Were you trying to spy out my regrets? You will find that your labor is lost! I accept everything, everything I have had and everything I have not had, my whole lot, wise and foolish. Everything has been as it should have been, the wise and the foolish. One makes mistakes: that is life. But it is never quite a mistake to have loved. Although age is overtaking me, my heart, at least, has no wrinkles. And although it has suffered, it is happy to have loved." And her grateful mind turned, with a smile, to those whom she had loved.

There was much tenderness in this smile and not a little French irony. Touched as she was at the thought of them, Annette perceived, curiously enough, the ridiculous side of all these torments, her own and those of others . . . that pitiful fever of desire and waiting! For what was she waiting? An end of love, for herself. For the others, too, in their turn!

She saw the others, her son, with his burning hands, quivering to grasp the uncertain future; Philippe, dissatisfied with the commonplace food that society offered his devouring hunger; Sylvie, trying to forget and looking to the future that would fill the gaping emptiness of her heart; the multitude of ordinary people yawning over the boredom of their life; and youth, restless youth, wander-

ing and waiting. . . . For what was it waiting? Towards what were its hands stretched out?

Liberated from herself, she looked at all these burden-bearers, saw that herd, that mob in the streets, hastening, running, each ignoring every one else, each as if pursued by the sheep-dogs, and, under the apparent disorder, the sovereign rhythm—all believing they directed themselves, all directed. . . . Towards what? Whither was he leading them, the invisible shepherd? . . . The good shepherd? . . . No! Beyond good and evil. . . .

She gave her lessons as usual, patient and attentive, listening kindly, explaining clearly, making no mistakes. Even as she spoke, the dream continued to envelop her. Whoever has formed the habit finds it easy to live two lives at a time, one on a level with the ground, with other men, the other in the depths of the dream that is bathed by the inner sun. One neglects neither of them. One reads them both with a glance as a musician's eye reads a score. Life is a symphony: each moment of life sings in several parts. The reverberation of this warm harmony brought the color to Annette's face. Her pupils today were astonished at her youthful air, and they conceived for her one of those strong attachments which the young feel for their elders, the Heralds of life, and which they dare not confess. Annette knew nothing of the wake of love that her passing left that day in the hearts of those who were near her.

She came home towards evening in the same aerial state. With her light heart, she felt as if she were moving on air. She could not have explained it. The powerful enigma of a woman enveloped in her own radiance, in a joy without apparent reason, even in the face of reason! Everything that surrounds her, the whole external world

is, at these moments, only a theme for the free improvisations of the passionate fantasy of her dreams.

She threaded her way, in the streets, through anxious groups of people. The newsboys were running about shouting the news which the passers-by were discussing. She saw and heard nothing. From a passing tram someone shouted something to her; she recalled who it was a moment later—Sylvie's husband. Without hearing what he said she had replied with a gay wave of her hand. . . . How excited everyone was! . . . Once more she had the brief sense of a dizzy current which, like the whirling spirals of star-dust, was rushing through a crevice in the vault into the abyss that drew it down. . . . What abyss? . . .

She climbed up to her apartment. Marc was awaiting her on the threshold, his eyes shining, and behind him, Sylvie, very much excited. They were eager to tell her the news. . . . What was it? Both spoke at once; each of them wanted to be the first. . . .

"But what on earth are you trying to tell me?" she said, laughing.

She distinguished one word, "War."

"War? What war?" But she was not surprised. . . . The abyss. . . . "So it was you? For a long time I have felt your breath drawing us down. . . ."

Their exclamations went on. To please them she roused herself—a little—from her somnambulistic state. . . . "War? Well, so be it! War, peace, it's all life, all part of the game. . . . I'll take my share! . . ."

She was a good player, the enchanted soul!

"I challenge God!"

THE END